

# **EDWIN S. SEMENZA: ON STAGE AND BACKSTAGE WITH PLAYERS FROM THE WORLD OF THEATER, EDUCATION, BUSINESS, AND POLITICS**

Interviewee: Edwin S. Semenza

Interviewed: 1971

Published: 1972

Interviewer: Mary Ellen Glass

UNOHP Catalog #054

## **Description**

Edwin Semenza, a native of Reno, was born in 1910. He grew up in a family that came to the West at the beginning of this century; they were influential in ranching and business. He attended local schools and the University of Nevada. His interest in the theater caused him to become involved in many aspects of the profession in western Nevada. Semenza spent many years as a part-time member of the University of Nevada faculty; taught at Susanville, California; saw wartime service; served on the Reno City Council; and has been since 1954 a successful executive in an insurance company.

Most significantly, however, Semenza was the director and guiding force of the Reno Little Theater from its beginning in 1935 to his retirement from the directorship in 1970. Reno's national reputation does not depend on its cultural activities, yet the Reno Little Theater is probably the most vital and durable cultural institution in Reno's history. Semenza recalls the enthusiasm and dedication of the relatively small groups that kept the project alive and the wide support the theater has enjoyed in the community. The theater group has included hundreds of local citizens, with widely varying backgrounds and interests.

Semenza designed sets, pounded nails, repaired the furnace, mopped up after floods in the basement, helped with makeup, checked on the box office, and checked at night to see that the lights were turned off. He did this for thirty-five years and retained both his tolerance and his sense of humor. The anecdotes and the section of the account called "To Be a Director of Plays" are a practical textbook for anyone interested in being a good community theater director.

In this oral history, Semenza provides anecdotes related to almost every production for thirty-five years, and he remembers intimately hundreds of people connected with the theater. His reminiscences illuminate an interesting period in the development of Reno, describe the growth of one of Reno's most important cultural institutions, and contribute significantly to an understanding of the little theater movement in America and the practical problems the movement faces.



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An Oral History Conducted by Mary Ellen Glass

University of Nevada Oral History Program

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Printed in the United States of America

Publication Staff:  
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## PREFACE TO THE DIGITAL EDITION

Established in 1964, the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) explores the remembered past through rigorous oral history interviewing, creating a record for present and future researchers. The program's collection of primary source oral histories is an important body of information about significant events, people, places, and activities in twentieth and twenty-first century Nevada and the West.

The UNOHP wishes to make the information in its oral histories accessible to a broad range of patrons. To achieve this goal, its transcripts must speak with an intelligible voice. However, no type font contains symbols for physical gestures and vocal modulations which are integral parts of verbal communication. When human speech is represented in print, stripped of these signals, the result can be a morass of seemingly tangled syntax and incomplete sentences—totally verbatim transcripts sometimes verge on incoherence. Therefore, this transcript has been lightly edited.

While taking great pains not to alter meaning in any way, the editor may have removed false starts, redundancies, and the “uhs,” “ahs,” and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled; compressed some passages which, in unaltered form, misrepresent the chronicler's meaning; and relocated some material to place information in its intended context. Laughter is represented with [laughter] at the end of a sentence in which it occurs, and ellipses are used to indicate that a statement has been interrupted or is incomplete...or that there is a pause for dramatic effect.

As with all of our oral histories, while we can vouch for the authenticity of the interviews in the UNOHP collection, we advise readers to keep in mind that these are remembered pasts, and we do not claim that the recollections are entirely free of error. We can state, however, that the transcripts accurately reflect the oral history recordings on which they were based. Accordingly, each transcript should be approached with the

same prudence that the intelligent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information. All statements made here constitute the remembrance or opinions of the individuals who were interviewed, and not the opinions of the UNOHP.

In order to standardize the design of all UNOHP transcripts for the online database, most have been reformatted, a process that was completed in 2012. This document may therefore differ in appearance and pagination from earlier printed versions. Rather than compile entirely new indexes for each volume, the UNOHP has made each transcript fully searchable electronically. If a previous version of this volume existed, its original index has been appended to this document for reference only. A link to the entire catalog can be found online at <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/>.

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Alicia Barber  
Director, UNOHP  
July 2012

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## INTRODUCTION

Edwin Semenza is a native of Reno, born in 1910. He attended local schools and the University of Nevada. His interest in the theater caused him to become involved in many aspects of the profession in western Nevada. This activity led to the founding of the Reno Little Theater. Professor Robert Gorrell's introduction to this volume discusses the importance of the Reno Little Theater to Nevada's cultural life.

Not solely interested in theatrical work, Mr. Semenza taught at the University of Nevada and at Susanville, California; he served a term on the Reno City Council; he became actively engaged in an insurance business. He also saw wartime service in the U. S. Army.

When invited to record his experiences for the Oral History Project, Edwin Semenza accepted graciously. He was a cooperative and enthusiastic chronicler through ten taping sessions, all held at his insurance office in Reno between January 12 and February 18, 1971. Mr. Semenza's review of his script resulted in no significant changes in

information, and only a few stylistic changes in language.

The Oral History Project of the University of Nevada, Reno, Library preserves the past and the present for future research by tape recording the reminiscences of persons who have been important to the development of Nevada and the West. Scripts resulting from the interviews are deposited in the Special Collections Departments of the University Libraries. Edwin Semenza has generously donated his literary rights in his oral history to the University of Nevada and has designated his volume as open for research.

Mary Ellen Glass  
University of Nevada, Reno  
1972



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## SPECIAL INTRODUCTION

Edwin Semenza's reminiscences are important to an understanding of the Reno community for a number of reasons. He is a native of Reno and grew up as a member of one of the families that came to the West at the beginning of this century and were influential in ranching and in business. He spent many years as a part-time member of the University of Nevada faculty, served on the Reno City Council, and has been since 1954 a successful executive in an insurance company. Most significantly, however, he was the director and guiding force for the Reno Little Theater from its beginning in 1935 to his retirement from the directorship in 1970.

Reno's national reputation does not depend on its cultural activities, yet the Reno Little Theater is especially significant as probably the most vital and most durable cultural institution in the city's history. The story of its development, as Semenza recalls it, reveals both the enthusiasm and dedication of the relatively small groups that kept the project alive and the wide support the theater has enjoyed in the community. The

theater group has included hundreds of local citizens, with widely varying backgrounds and interests—bankers, painters, teachers, electricians, laborers, divorcees, workers from the clubs, military personnel from Stead, students and faculty from the University, mechanics, lawyers—all of them working together cooperatively, as the reminiscences emphasize, as actors, stagehands, lighting or sound technicians, scene designers or scene painters, prompters, ushers, lounge attendants, publicity writers, program editors, or members of the theater's board of directors. The following story of the theater is distinguished by Semenza's remarkable ability to recall anecdotes related to almost every production for thirty-five years and to remember intimately hundreds of people connected with the theater. It is in many ways a history of Reno during the period of the city's most rapid growth.

The story is important in another way. Successful direction of a community theater, which depends almost exclusively on amateurs, requires special skills as well as

unusual patience and wisdom. An awkward but eager scene painter cannot be turned out and replaced after a call to the union hiring hall. An inexperienced actor cannot be dismissed and told to try again when he has learned how to walk on stage and how to project his voice. Rigid rules on promptness or attendance at rehearsals are hard to enforce. The whole operation has to depend on willing cooperation, and the director has to gain this cooperation without threats or temperament or even much authority. And if a community theater is to succeed, the director cannot restrict himself to the artistic problems of interpreting the script; Semenza designed sets, pounded nails, repaired the furnace, mopped up after floods in the basement, helped with makeup, checked on the box office, calmed wives whose husbands were consistently late after rehearsals and husbands whose acting wives neglected their cooking, and checked at night to see that the lights were turned off. The anecdotes indicate that Semenza managed this kind of program for thirty-five years and retained both his tolerance and his sense of humor. The anecdotes and the section of the account called "To Be a Director of Plays" are a practical textbook for anyone interested in being a good community theater director.

Semenza's reminiscences illuminate an interesting period in the development of Reno, describe the growth of one of Reno's most important cultural institutions, and contribute significantly to an understanding of the little theater movement in America and the practical problems the movement faces.

Professor Robert Gorrell  
Department of English  
University of Nevada, Reno  
1972

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## EARLY LIFE, EDUCATION, CAREERS

I guess the first thing I should do would be to establish the fact that I was born [laughing]. I was born in Reno, January 8, 1910, and at home, since hospitals were considered rather frivolous and my parents were in rather modest circumstances. I do remember, also, the name of my doctor, who was Dr. [Howard M.] Moser. He had his residence on the corner of First Street and Sierra, where the J. C. Penney building is. It was a very gloomy brown house, and I always associated—. I never really cottoned to him as our personal doctor, mine in particular, because he was cross-eyed, for one thing, and it frightened [laughing] the living daylights out of me every time my mother took me to see him. But fortunately, we were a very healthy family, so we didn't have too many occasions to go to the doctor's.

I was what would be known as the fourth sibling in a family of six children. I had four sisters and one brother. My oldest sister, Nevada Semenza Christian, was born in Reno. In fact, all of us were born here. And then Mother had my brother, Lawrence John,

and then my sister, Rena Semenza Safford, and then me. There was a gap of four years before my other two sisters [Evelyn English and Grace Semenza] arrived on the scene. They, also, were born at home, but by that time, we moved from 151 Vine Street to 141 Vine Street. So that's where my two younger sisters were born.

My father [John L. Semenza] was born in 1872 in just a little country—you couldn't even call it a town, a little settlement, oh, in the hills above Genoa, Italy. He came from very, very poor circumstances. His parents scratched out a living in the very terrible soil, shall we say, of that region. There were six boys, one girl. I'm not too sure; I think my father was the fourth oldest or the fifth oldest. His sister was older than he. And he got as far as the fourth grade in the little rural school that was over there, which gave him the ability to read and write, in Italian, of course. He left when he was fourteen years old, shortly after his father had been killed in an altercation over some property. And his widowed mother was sorely put to support all of the children.

So they emigrated. I think my dad followed one or two of his brothers who had come over ahead of him (they were a little older). But anyway, he came over; I think it was with an uncle. In those days, there was quite a trade, shall we say, in bringing immigrants Over, and the promoters usually found jobs for them. I suppose the middle man who arranged this got some sort of a cut out of the thing.

My father worked at first at odd jobs. I'm not sure just exactly when he arrived in this area, because he had done some mining in Colorado (he was sort of following the gold rush). And then he went to Alaska. He was in his midtwenties at this time. He went to Alaska for the gold rush. He thought he had struck it rich with a claim. So he came out of Alaska and came down to Virginia City, and that's where he married my mother. They were married November the thirtieth—Thanksgiving Day, I was told, in 1900. And then he left and Went back to Alaska to sell the mine or to work the claim that he had. It turned out that it was nothing. So that was a dead end, and he came out of Alaska with nothing but a great deal of experience. It was enough that it convinced him that he should get into something else besides trying to strike it rich. He landed, as I say, in Virginia City because there was mining activity. And his older brother, [William L.] Bill Semenza, was working for—I remember the name—Charlie Noce, who ran a grocery store in Virginia City. This was in the '90's.

My uncle came to Reno and started a grocery store here. So that in turn started the migration from Virginia City to Reno.

My mother [Louise V. Semenza] was born in what was known in those days as "the dead man's ranch" on the east side of Washoe Lake. I think it was on the little grade that went up to Virginia City, called the Jumbo Grade. That was the road that the Bowers took when

Mrs. Bowers used to bring the laundry down into Washoe Valley to use the hot springs. I think that was the road. Well, there was a little spring up, part way up. Actually, the water didn't come from the spring, but it was seepage from the flume that went from Marlette Lake to Virginia City. I think there was seepage from the flume that carried the water up to Virginia City, and that was sufficient to water their few acres.

My grandparents, my mother's mother, Mary Feretti, and father, John Feretti, came to America and landed first in New Jersey. I think it was in Hoboken because I understand I still have relatives in Hoboken, New Jersey. I've looked at it, and it was sufficiently depressing that I never [laughing] followed it up. And my oldest aunt [Rose Feretti Semenza] was born in New Jersey. In fact, she's the only living relative now. She's at St. Mary's, in the rest home there. She's ninety-six.

Anyway, they came west. They scratched out a living on this little ranch, and my mother was born there (there was no doctor in attendance, of course). And she was the second of four girls. Shortly (I think she was four or five years old), her father got a job as a section hand for the V and T Railroad, and they moved to a little—well, it was the section hand's cabin. It was located on the Lakeview Hill, almost on the crest of the hill. It was pointed out to me enough times by my mother; every time we went to Carson City, she always pointed out the location where this cabin was. And the other two—no, one sister, the youngest sister, was Matilda A. Feretti, was born there. I believe the third oldest sister [Mary A. Dell'Acqua] was born on the ranch. They lived at Lakeview for several years.

One of my mother's favorite stories was her recalling how she and [her] oldest sister, Rose, walked to Carson City to go to school. And in the good weather, it wasn't so bad. It



was about six miles, and they went directly down through the sagebrush. But in the wintertime, it was a real chore. Her teacher, one of her first teachers, was Roxie Wingfield's mother, who was [Alice W.] Thoma. (She was the daughter of Dr. Thoma, for whom Thoma Street is named.) She was a very considerate person, as far as my mother was concerned, because sometimes they never got to the schoolroom until around ten or ten-thirty in the morning if it was a particularly stormy day. And they never thought of not going to school. When these little waifs came dragging into the schoolroom, the class accepted this as a normal event. Nothing was ever made of it. And sometimes, on a very stormy day, the teacher would come over (it'd be one, one-thirty, or two o'clock; it'd be snowing), and she'd say, "I think it's time for you to start for home now because you don't want to get caught." And my mother said many a time that they would start, and it would be dark by the time they got home, plowing through the snow. It was on one of these occasions that she and my other aunts helped my grandmother when she delivered the last child. It was my aunt, Miss Feretti.

There wasn't too much general education available. My mother got through the eighth grade in Carson City, but never did get to high school. She had to start to work. I don't think two of my other aunts finished. My Aunt Matilda did get through high school, and she got a teacher's credential. In those days, you could get one if you graduated from high school. And so she started out. She taught first at Pyramid Lake, and then she taught up at Mayberry ranch, and then eventually moved into the Reno schools and taught in the McKinley Park school for many years until she retired. She never married.

I always considered it something of a handicap to have an aunt who was a teacher

in the school that I was attending. I think, also, we were all victims of the fact that we had so many relatives living in an immediate area. My father and his two brothers, Rocco and William L., lived within a block of each other. And my father and one of his brothers, Bill, married my mother and her sister, Rose. So there was a double tie there. So in addition to the regular family unity that was typical of a Latin family, we had a very strong connection.

After her marriage, my mother and her sisters moved to Reno, and her two sisters lived across the Street from us, at 142 Vine Street. And these two sisters supported my grandfather and grandmother. One of them, Mary Albina, or "Bena," as she was called, worked as a bookkeeper, and the other [Matilda] was the teacher.

One of my earliest recollections was of my [maternal] grandfather dying. I was four at the time. As I say, we lived across the street, and I can recall my aunt coming over and calling my mother and telling her that Grandfather had died. And I can also recall an early recollection of him being laid out in my Aunt Matilda's bedroom. Apparently, that was the accepted thing [laughing] at the time. That was my first encounter with death in the immediate family.

I guess I had the usual, the normal childhood. I guess the strongest influences in this time were my family, the church (my mother was a very devout Catholic), and the school. Both my mother and father believed in education. My father had been denied an education, and he considered that as one of his primary aims. He was determined that he would get all of his children through college and give 'em as much education as possible.

My father was a very—I guess you could call him a devout Mason (as my mother was the devout Catholic), even though my father had been raised in a Catholic family. One

of the things that had turned him from the church was the fact that the local parish priest had been a witness at the altercation in which my grandfather had been killed. And he had lied and went to the defense of the other man, and that just soured my father on the whole situation.

However, he believed that it was very important that we be raised with the proper religious training. So we went to St. Thomas Aquinas parish (it was the only one in the town), and then we all went to McKinley Park school, which is on Riverside Drive and Vine Street. I went through the eighth grade, and we all went to Reno High School, which has long since changed its location.

My sister Nevada went on, was the first one to go to the University of Nevada, from which all six of us graduated. I think the highlight of my father's life, as far as the children growing up was concerned, was when his oldest daughter won the gold medal for scholarship up there. And that meant, oh, a tremendous amount to him.

Although, as I say, he had no practical education, and his writing left something to be desired, he learned a great deal through his association in the lodges. I think that it meant more to him to belong to the Odd Fellows lodge than it did the other Masonic orders, although he went regularly and belonged to many of them. I don't know enough about the branches of Masonry to be able to say, but he was a Shriner, so that meant he became a thirty-second degree Mason, or something.

His older brother, Bill, took to the Masonic lodge as if it were a complete religion, and he was completely absorbed with it. He was a dedicated man. And his family attended all of the lodge functions. And strangely enough, we got involved in it. My mother was never a lodge woman. She didn't have the time, not with six children [laughing]. But that's where

I got my first brush with meeting the public, in that my aunt and uncle used to have me entertain at those horrible lodge meetings [laughing] which featured entertainment. I think I went through all of the clichés as far as the poems from "The Night Before Christmas" to James Whitcomb Riley, and Longfellow, and all the rest of them. And I also used to take part in the programs that were given at the church and at the schools.

My one and only vocal appearance was as a soloist for a Christmas program that was a community effort, and it was staged on the front steps of the courthouse. It must have been about 1918 or '19. I sang the solo part of the page in the carol "Good King Wenceslaus." And as I recall, Laurance Layman was one of the tenor soloists. I think he sang the role of the king. I don't know why I mention this, but it was the fact that I was always dragged out into something of that nature.

I was also called upon to recite the Declaration of Independence in Powning Park for a Fourth of July celebration which must have been around 1920 or '21, something of the sort, because when my Aunt Matilda died a couple of years or so ago, among her souvenirs (and she kept everything, believe me!) was a snapshot of me dolled up for this particular occasion. And unfortunately, it got to my children before it got to me, and I was unable to censor it [laughing].

Let's see, a little bit more about my—. My father moved to Reno from Virginia City, as I said, after he had married my mother, who was twenty-two. She was born August 5, 1878. They came to Reno dead broke, and they lived in a cabin down near the old Reno flour mill, which became the red light district a few years after they [laughing] left that area. But they lived on the banks of the Truckee River. And my father, one of the first jobs he got was as a scavenger. He hauled garbage, and he went around in a

wagon to make his daily pickups. My brother said afterwards that the only mistake he made was in giving it up so soon, that he should've hung on to it until it—because he could have [laughing] made a fortune at it.

But he left that. He recognized the fact that there wasn't much social status in that particular job, nor much financial remuneration. And he bought into my uncle's grocery business. My uncle was one who always ran scared. He always wanted to be sure of everything. And he was rather canny in that he made some rather fine investments in mining properties at Olinghouse. I think it was the area toward Fernley or Wadsworth. And he did very well. He never told anybody how much he made. Always a subject of great speculation in our family was, "Just how much money does Uncle Bill have? He is so tight! [Laughing] He must be hanging onto it."

The rent was raised on the store, which, incidentally, was located for many, many years at the corner of the alley at 25 East Second Street, where Harrah's Terrace Room restaurant now is. It was right on that corner there, and it was a small store. When the rent was raised, my uncle thought it was time to get out, so he sold it to his unsuspecting younger brother who had four children at the time to support. But my dad made a success of it because he was a born salesman. And he just used to get out, and he would canvass this town. And he used to do not only retail, but he would wholesale a lot to, oh, the restaurants and the hotels. In order to service the restaurants properly, he opened the store at seven o'clock in the morning and he worked until seven at night weekdays, but worked 'til nine on Saturday nights, and then he was open on Sundays, Sunday mornings. So those made long days for him.

My brother was early initiated into the ways of commerce by working in the store.

He used to go out on the delivery wagon and help make deliveries. In those days the store had a wagon, and we had two horses, Nellie and Dan, and we had a yard for them up on Vine Street, and we had a barn. (I mention the barn because that was the first theater in which I [laughing] gave any dramatic productions. They were for the benefit of the neighborhood.) We all four older children took our turn working in the grocery store. My older sister worked on the books; so did my brother. And it was sort of a family affair. And my father made a pretty good living out of it.

One thing that we can say: We may not have been the most fashionably dressed kids in town, but we certainly were the best fed [laughing]! My mother was an excellent cook. And one of the talents that she'd picked up when she was living in Carson was to learn how to cook from an old chef who had come from Europe. He taught her all of these culinary dishes that were the delight of our family as we were growing up.

My father operated the grocery store until 1927. When he sold out, he had a bout of illness. My brother had graduated from the University in 1925 and went to work for the telephone company in Stockton. My father came down with an attack at that time (they called it neuritis) in his left arm, so Lawrence had to come back, and he ran the store for a year and a half or so, long enough for him to know that he never wanted to be in the grocery business.

So I, also, had been pulled in at the ripe age of nine or ten, and I used to do my share of work on weekends, after school occasionally, if I couldn't think of *any* other excuse to get out of it. My first job was sprouting potatoes in the basement. You know, they would dump potatoes down there in great quantities, and I used to have to go down and pull all

the sprouts I laughing] off the things before they would be bagged upstairs. The grocery business was considerably different from the packaged affair that it is right now!

As I say, my dad sold out in 1927, and he and my mother took a trip to South America. I was in college by then, and I worked for the new owner of the store, keeping books after school and on Saturdays. I was a miserable bookkeeper! I did not take after my brother, who had just a natural flair for math. He was very sharp, and when he left the telephone company, he had an opportunity, then, to go into banking, and he decided he would go on and get his master's degree in accounting at UC, which he did. Then he taught for a year at the University of Nevada, and then he became an assistant to the bank examiner, state bank examiner, and went from there into the CPA firm of George Edler, eventually succeeded him in the firm and reestablished the firm as Semenza-Kottinger, and now it's known as Semenza-Kottinger-McMullen. But he got the mathematical interests, and it skipped me and went to my son, who has an aptitude for math.

I'll go back now a bit to school. Let's see. As I said, I went eight years to McKinley Park school. I remember my first grade teacher was Emilie Yparraguire, who is still living here in Reno. Her sister, Beatrice Yparraguire, was a legal secretary in those days and still is. They are in some way related to the Yparraguires who live here. A number of them are attorneys. And one of their characteristics is a great longevity [laughing], apparently, because they're all quite elderly. I was tryin' to think—another one of my teachers was the present Mrs. Joe Hall. Her name was Miss Pion, Hazel Pion, and she was married to Joe Hall, who was a realtor here in town.

As I say, my aunt taught at the McKinley Park school. The year that I dreaded most of all was the year that I had her as my teacher—

not that she wasn't a good teacher, but it was just the fact that I couldn't do anything in school that it wasn't reported to my parents [laughing]. And I felt that was taking unfair advantage of the situation. That was the seventh grade.

I graduated and went to Reno High School in 1922. Let's see. One of my first classmates from another school that I met there at Reno High School was Walter Clark, Walter Van Tilburg Clark. He was only known as just Walt Clark in those days. I guess my closest chum in high school was Dan Senseney, who was the grandson of Uncle Dan Wheeler. (And his mother, who became a great friend of my mother, just died last year about four or five months after my mother died.) Dan was a very bright student. He had literary aspirations. He played the violin under compulsion. His mother insisted that he learn the violin, and he played at various concerts.

My mother, not to be outdone, insisted that all of us take piano lessons to begin with. My brother took violin. It didn't take with him. My oldest sister played the piano, and she played the piano in the McKinley Park orchestra. My sister, Rena, played a little bit at the piano, but her talent was primarily singing. She had a very fine singing voice, and she sang all over the community for every cat and dog fight that went on. I had absolutely no singing ability other than the one experience that Christmastime. Even though I took two years of the piano, primarily because our tenant in the house downstairs—we lived in a two-story house, and the tenant downstairs was a music teacher. So I took lessons, and she took it out on the rent. And we both managed to survive about two years, and then I gave up the piano. And that was my last experience with music [laughing].

I went to high school. I took just a college preparatory course. I think my favorite

teacher was Helena J. Shade, whom I had first met at some of the Masonic parties. She was an Eastern Star, I believe, and I first got to meet her when I was on the program for the various activities that they had. She was a very inspirational English teacher. I know she was a great help to Walter Clark. She afterward moved to southern California and taught there until she retired.

Reno High School had an enrollment of approximately four hundred at the time I was there. Oh, I got to be fairly active in activities. I was always undersized, so I was never athletically inclined. I guess maybe I was a physical coward at the time and couldn't stand the thought of getting out and getting knocked around. So I went into other, safer activities like dramatics.

We had a wonderful drama teacher in my last two years. Her name was Louise Lyons Johnson. She came from the Middle West. She was from Minnesota, as she pronounced it. And it was the only regional characteristic that she couldn't eliminate from her speech. And she always used to say that, "My pronunciation of the word 'Minnesota' gives me away [laughing], her Norwegian background. But she did a very fine job of dramatics in high school. And I was in all the plays, as many as I could get into, although, as I said, I was small for my age and wasn't too easy to cast. Oh, we did all kinds of things besides present straight, regular plays. We did a lot of programs, of variety shows, and so on.

In those days, it was the movies. I was a great movie fan. So was my father. My dad had a natural flair for histrionics. (He went through all of the chairs in the Odd Fellows, and I have often heard people like Tate Williams say that my dad was the greatest King Sol they ever had [laughing] in the IOOF.) Dad used to get passes to the local theaters in return for allowing them to put

their program or show bills in his window. So he had a regular pass to the Wigwam Theater, now the Crest. He used to see all the movies, and he would come home, and we would get reports from him about what the shows were. And so we all went.

In those days, they used to have the matinees with their serials, you know, *Perils of Pauline* with Pearl White, and so on. And then after the pictures, there would be the showering of candy kisses, which would be thrown out, and we'd scramble all over the floor for those insidious pieces of candy. But I thought the theater was just great. The movies were *the* thing.

At that time, there was the Wigwam Theater, the Grand Theater, and the Majestic Theater. Eventually the Grand became the Granada. I always remember they took the sign down from the Grand Theater, which was where the Arcade building is now. And then they built the Granada.

I won a pass to the Granada Theater for one year for writing a review of a movie. I was in the second grade. The movie was called, as I recall, *Phantasmagoria*. I gave a review of that movie in the second grade. We didn't write it; we gave it orally. My oldest sister, Nevada, was in the eighth grade, as I recall, and she wrote it; she had the best essay on it. But they could only give it to one in the family, and as I was the younger of the two of us who were winners, I got the pass. And that seemed to be the fate that my oldest sister had all through grammar school. She was always at the top of the class, but through some trick of fate somehow or other [laughing], she never got what she had coming to her.

But anyway, I got a chance to see all of these shows that came to the Granada Theater, and we, all of us, as a family, kept that up. The only one who wasn't a movie goer was my mother. Naturally, she didn't have time



for it at night. She would be exhausted from feeding and cleaning and taking care of all of us children. And my dad, after he closed the store at seven o'clock at night, would go to the Wigwam Theater to see the show, and he would get home around nine o'clock. And no one thought that was particularly unusual. That was on nights when he didn't go to lodge meetings. But I guess the theater meant quite a bit.

I recall that the Majestic Theater was the first—was the only legitimate theater in town for many, many years. And the first play I can remember was called *The Bishop's Carriage*. And I sat on a Sunday afternoon in what was known as “nigger heaven.” It was the second balcony, and there weren't even chairs. We sat on sort of benches that were permanent benches that were built in there. That was where I saw the first play, and boy, I thought that was the greatest thing that ever happened!

When I got to be a sophomore in high school, I got a job at the Majestic, opening the door on winter nights for the customers. They had a manager at the Majestic whose name was Frank Costello, and he came from California and he was a real showman. He brought in stage acts to the Majestic Theater 'cause they had a full stage, and he had a stage band made up of local musicians. He used to bring in specialty acts, and he would also develop local talent.

Among the local talent introduced was my sister, Rena, and her friend, Ethel Lunsford (Frost now). She and my sister sang duets for every—any way you can think of. And they used to do a lot of acts and appear at the Majestic Theater. And accompanying them on the violin was Leota Maestretti [Raiford] (her father was the judge here for so many years). Those three were all in the same sorority together, and they entertained all through their college years.

Well, Frank Costello developed them. I got the job of handling the door. On Sunday afternoons, as part of my rewards—I got six dollars a week, I think—I was able to see whatever stage shows that came to Reno. They would come then, at that time, to the Granada Theater. The Henry Duffy players were a stock company that was very successful during the '20's. Henry Duffy married Dale Winter, who was previously tied in with a Chicago mob somehow; anyway, he married her. She may have had some talent as an actress, but in those days, I thought she was the greatest actress I'd ever seen. And they had—Duffy developed a series, a chain of theaters. In San Francisco it was the Alcazar, in Oakland it was the Duffwin, and then he had a theater in Portland, Los Angeles, and I think in Seattle. And he brought shows. When they were on tour, he brought them into Reno to the Granada Theater. As a reward for my being the doorman at the Majestic, I was able to go in free and see the shows. Oh, I saw a lot of the old standbys. And then the Henry Duffy chain collapsed during the Depression. When it hit in 1929, those theaters were among the first that were hit. I was attending summer school at UC in Berkeley at the time, and I used to go. The first summer I went [to] every one of the changes of bill at the Duffwin Theater there in Oakland. But that was one of the mortalities of the Depression in 1930, and so that was the end of the Henry Duffy chain.

Getting back to the Majestic—one of the crushing experiences was the afternoon there was a new stage show going on. I came sashaying from outside, going to go to the little boys' room, and I went whipping through the lobby doing some sort of a fantastic dance step to the music. Frank J. Costello was standing behind the door there, and he followed me into the men's room and said, “You are fired!” [laughing] “Now. Right now.” He said, “You

can come back next week and get your pay, but you're through as of now."

Well, I was certainly crushed. I was in tears. I went home, told my parents. My father said, "There's only one thing you have to do. You go back, and you get paid, right now. Because when they fire you like this, they pay you. You don't wait a week for your pay."

That was the most agonizing experience I ever went through [laughing], to go back and say, "My father said I should be paid."

Costello said, "We pay on Saturday nights."

I said, "My father said" [laughing] "when you fire anyone, you pay them, right then and there. And I want to be paid,"

And I remember he turned to Marguerite Dougherty, who was a character around here for many, many years, and said, "Marguerite, pay him off."

So I got paid. And I went over to the Granada Theater, and they didn't know yet that I had been fired, and I walked in and I saw a road show that was playing there. So I felt that I had come out of that experience a little better off, though it had looked pretty bleak that afternoon. But that was my first job, actually, in the theater—not a very brilliant [laughing] beginning, believe me.

Let's see. I graduated from Reno High School in 1926, determined that I was going to be a lawyer. Somebody had sold my father a bill of goods, in that they sold him a correspondence course in law, which I could very easily take up. And by the time I graduated from college, if I just worked on this correspondence course on the side, I would be able to take my examination for the state bar here. And the whole thing sounded beautiful to my father. He thought this was just a great opportunity. So he sailed for the course. And I had a very agonizing first year in college, in that I knew I should be working [laughing]

on the correspondence course. Because it got to the point where my father would say, "And what lessons have we sent in?"

Well, that first summer before college started, I did manage to get a few lessons out. And I learned what a contract was. But when I once started actual college, I was unable to keep up, even though college was a lot more relaxed, much easier than it is now.

[Laughing] I think I eventually faced the matter fairly and squarely about the end of my first year in college when I said to my father, "I cannot keep up. I have lost any interest that I may have exhibited in law as a career."

And that was motivated by the fact that we had a member of the faculty (it was his first year at the University of Nevada) who came in my freshman year, and he was a graduate of the University of California with a background in drama. His name was Edwin Duerr. And he came to Nevada and set things upside down. He took over a rather dying sort of drama activity and really pepped things up. He put in a full program. He gave five and six plays a year. I remember his salary was \$1,500 a year, and for that, I think he must've put out \$10,000 worth of work, physical energy. He was just a regular dynamo. I just thought he was the greatest person. And he was the one that started me away from the idea of law into going into the theater. I didn't care what phase of theater, but I was going to get somewhere there. I was going to get into drama.

In college, I was very active in dramatic activities. The Campus Players acquired a new lease on life under Edwin Duerr, and we did a lot of good shows. And he, also, in our junior year, took the senior play on a state tour. They went to Winnemucca, they went to Ely, and to Tonopah, Elko, and they—in fact, they were gone a week. We were planning the same thing in our senior year, taking our senior play [on tour], and for that occasion, we had all of

the group that I ran around with. We were all in the same class. And we were all cast in the play and we were all ready to go. But this was 1930. The Depression had come the fall of '29, and the Nevada towns were hard hit, and none of them could take our tour. So we never did have an opportunity to go on a tour of the state.

Edwin Duerr put on many excellent shows during those four years. I'm trying to think of some of them—*He Who Gets Slapped*, he did *Outward Bound*, in which I played a good role. In *He Who Gets Slapped*, I had a bit part which I almost messed up. I came on as a waiter at a tragic moment, and unfortunately my shirttail was hanging out. I almost ruined that scene. He did *Lilliom*, and *The Enchanted Cottage*, Pinero's play. In fact, drama was at a very high point during the four years that he was in charge. Then we were very closely associated because he was on campus the four years we were. We knew him in classroom and extracurricular activities. He went from the University of Nevada to Cornell for his MA, and from there, he went to Carnegie Tech. He taught in Carnegie Tech, and he wrote textbooks on acting. He went on into professional radio, and for many years, he was the producer of the Henry Aldrich series on radio.

I subsequently lost track of him. I know he went to Hollywood and he was connected with Lord and Thompson advertising agency. He went to Hollywood, and I think about a year or a year and a half ago, there was quite a ruckus in the California state university system when the campus at Fullerton presented a play called *The Beard*, which was a real sexy play. And the producer of that play was an Edwin Duerr. I have never been able to tie it up as to whether that was the same one, or whether it was a relative (now, to my knowledge, he never married). But this is the

sort of thing he was capable of, because he was a real adventurer in the theater. He never believed in taking the obvious, but he was always trying for something new. I don't know what happened to him, but he really made his impression up here on the campus.

[At the University] I started out to be on the *Sagebrush* staff, because here again was this imitative nature of mine, in that my oldest sister had been a journalism major. She had been the editor of the *Desert Wolf*, which was the literary magazine, and she had written for the *Sagebrush*, and so on, and so I figured that was the thing to do. So when I was a freshman, I tried out for the *Sagebrush*, but I didn't last too long. I got some rather deadly beats, for me, and I couldn't write up and get enough interest in them. Then I worked on the *Desert Wolf*, which, at that time, changed from a literary magazine to a college humor magazine. The editor of the *Desert Wolf* in my senior year was Dan McKnight, who was the son of the local judge, Judge William McKnight. The editor of the *Sagebrush* was Jimmy Hammond from Fallon, who afterwards went to California and became very successful in public relations work. Then I was chosen the editor of the *Artemisia*.

I got into the college annual in my junior year because Dan Senseney, whom I mentioned was my close friend, was the editor. He stuck it out with the *Artemisia* from his freshman year. And he got to be editor in his junior year, and I helped him during that year. As it so happened, there was nobody else who was qualified to become editor the following year who had been there any longer than I. So I got the job in a fluke. I should've been on there three years before I could be elected editor. And I enjoyed that.

That was a great experience. We had an award-winning annual. There again, my advisor was Edwin Duerr, who was a very



capable, competent writer. He helped me in planning the book the summer before my senior year 'cause I was in Berkeley going to summer school to pick up some extra credits so I wouldn't have to take a heavy load in my senior year. I think I was only carrying eleven units, or twelve, in my senior year in order to edit the yearbook and also keep up in the other activities in which I got myself involved.

Well, my first two years, I went in for debating. That's when I still thought I was going to be a lawyer, you know. So my first year I got into Clionia, was the name of the debating society. But I left that. One of my confreres in debating was Alan Bible. I first debated against Alan when we were seniors in high school. He was in Fallon High, and I was in Reno High School, and I went down there with Julian Sourwine and debated against him. Julian is now in the—. He was on Senator McCarran's—. What was that committee? Anyway, it was an anti-Communist investigating committee, and Julian Sourwine was the chief lawyer who went through all those purges in the '50's. His son came out to Nevada and was our deputy attorney general. Julian himself came out and ran for U. S. Senate, was defeated.

But Alan, right off the bat, was an incipient senator when he was a freshman in college. He had the typical oratorical tone in his voice. He was cut out for it. It was the most natural thing in the world, to see Alan Bible going up and eventually winding up in the Senate. And as soon as his hair gets snow white, he's going to look like Senator McCarran. I have had occasion in the insurance business to go back to Washington on—well, I'll use the vulgar term "on lobbying business," and I have looked up Alan, and we've sort of kept up in the grass roots contact.

Oh, let's see. I was noticing in the annual—. Let's see, other activities—oh, my fraternity

was Phi Sigma Kappa, principally 'cause my older brother was a member. As I said, I belonged to the Campus Players. We also organized an honorary dramatic group that was known as Masque and Dagger, which was an offshoot of the chapter at the University of California. Again, through Edwin Duerr, they decided to go national, and we were the second chapter. After Edwin Duerr left, they decided they would stay as a local [laughing], and they disowned this chapter here.

I guess I was in every Wolves' Frolic for the four years that I was in college, and had a great time in it. The Wolves' Frolic sort of followed a pattern for many, many years. There was always a dance chorus that opened the Frolic and opened the second half of the show and usually closed the show. For many years, that dance chorus was coached by Ruth Ryan, who was the sister of Margaret Sampson, Major Sampson's wife. For a great many years, Bill Miller of the University of Nevada faculty directed the Wolves' Frolic. He came from the University of Southern California in 1933, I believe.

Dramatics on the university campus was coached by a William Kelly Collonan in 1930 and '31. He came to the University from the University of California (he had been interested in dramatics), and he was in my circle of associates. But nobody liked William Kelly Collonan. He was older than the rest of us by at least ten years, and he was a very domineering sort of person. I guess you could say he could make a good director from that standpoint. But he accepted this job of coaching theater up there on campus when I went to Susanville upon graduation. He left after two years, and Bill Miller came in from the University of Southern California. I was offered the job again, and I turned it down because there just wasn't enough money in it. Bill Miller had a master's degree, and I

managed to get around to meet him, and we have been friends ever since. Bill was a tremendous help in getting the Reno Little Theater started because he knew what was ahead, and he helped in many ways besides acting in numerous roles.

Let's see if I've overlooked anything particularly. Well, I belonged to Phi Kappa Phi. I guess I must've made the honor roll a couple of times, to my father's gratification. See, my oldest sister set this record. There was one time when three members, the three oldest children, were all on the honor roll the same semester. And oh, boy, did that mean a great deal to him! We have since put the proper perspective on this. Then when my two younger sisters came along, my sister Grace was on the honor roll; Evelyn was not on regularly, as I recall. Oh, she did get on a couple of times. But Grace didn't have much problem because she was pretty smart. She, too, was interested in drama. Grace was exactly four years behind me in college. And my sister, Rena, who was ahead of me, was four years ahead. All three of us worked in the Little Theater at some time or other.

I guess I got Grace involved. She was in the theater at the University with Blythe Bulmer under Bill Miller. I know Grace played Mrs. Alving in *Ghosts*, Ibsen's *Ghosts*. And things went swimmingly for two nights, but on the third night, she was stricken with laryngitis. In fact, she woke up that morning with laryngitis and couldn't speak. I think Bill Miller went through a most agonizing day, taking her to every doctor and calling up everybody to see if they had a remedy for laryngitis, to see if they could bring her voice back. They were not successful, however, and she acted the part in pantomime, and Blythe Bulmer read her lines from offstage. They have remained friends all their lives. Of course, Blythe is the key figure and the sole remaining

actress from the original founding group [of the Reno Little Theater].

When I graduated from the University, Duerr was leaving, and I had an opportunity to take a fellowship and teach some, part time, and also direct the plays. But in the meantime, I got a job in Susanville, teaching in the high school and junior college there, largely through the efforts of Mrs. King, who was the mother of the present Mrs. Marvin Humphrey. She was on the school board. While she was only one of five members, she was one of the most influential on the board. She was a pioneer of Lassen County. She was a Plumb, and was related to the Reno Plumbs, from which we get Plumb Lane. Her name was Mabel Plumb King. She had watched what I was doing in college. I knew her daughter, Lucy, who was, as I recall, a year behind me at Nevada, but I knew her very well. She asked me to go up to Susanville and meet her mother and see if I wouldn't like to apply for a teaching job there.

And I did. I was not certified because in California you have to have five years' college education. I was graduated from up here and we had only four. So I got in through a temporary speech credential. I went to UC the summer of 1930. I went to both Intersession and summer session and picked up enough credits to get that temporary credential so I could teach there in Susanville.

As I look back, I was a very immature, callow person, extremely imitative in what I did, certainly in theater. But I went to Susanville and worked like a dog. I put on plays there which they had never had before, including their first brush with Shakespeare. I did *Macbeth*, which almost did me in, and Shakespeare, too, I put on *Quality Street*, [by] James Barrie. And I mention this because the boy that I had in the lead, who was the young soldier in the play, his name was Frank

Cady. His father was the district attorney of Lassen County. And his older brother, Don, he afterwards became the district attorney up there. But young Frank had the theater bug. And as I say, he was in practically every show I did up there. He played the lead in *Quality Street*. After World War II, he came into Reno and looked me up and said he had gone to Hollywood. He wanted to be an actor. I lost track of him, and he showed up on—what's the TV series, has the trolleys, that used to be the toot-toot and you'd see the engine chugging along, and that little old train? Not too long ago. *Petticoat Junction*, yeah. And he was the storekeeper in that thing. And Frank was on for years; I saw the name. I would not have recognized him at first, 'cause by this time he was bald, and he was a man in his late fifties. (Incidentally, I started teaching at twenty, so there wasn't much of a gap in years between my students and me.) And I was very interested that Frank had that theater bug. He never could get it out of his system. His father was very established; he was influential. He was one of the heavy stockholders in the power company there in Lassen County, and here was this son who was going [laughing] into something that wasn't profitable! But he made a success of it.

Anyway, I handled drama, I taught English, I taught journalism, I was the advisor for the annual, and also helped put out the school newspaper. And as I say, I directed a full bill of plays. And every Monday night I played with the volleyball team—the faculty volleyball team. And I hated that Monday night! It was just the most ghastly experience you can imagine! I told you I was twenty years old, and the next people must've been thirty-five, anyway. We had two school board members who played on the volleyball team. And there just was no common interest at all between us, me, the youngest member of the faculty,

and those people. And they just thought that volleyball was the greatest experience in the world. The greatest thing they looked forward to was this volleyball night on Mondays. And Mrs. King had warned me that that was one of the drawbacks to the job, that I would be expected to participate. Because everybody who joined the faculty had to play volleyball.

The only way I got out of it, in my second year of teaching, was when a ball came out of nowhere and hit my glasses and shattered them. At that point other players came running up to me and said, "Are you goin' to be able to continue playing volleyball?" They didn't ask me if I'd put my eye out, or anything of the sort [laughing].

And I said, "No, I'm not goin' to play volleyball. I can't do anything without my glasses." And I never went back. That ended it.

Let's see if I have anything more to say about my teaching experience. I think at times, I was a pretty good teacher. I know I was a different teacher, as far as those children in Susanville were concerned, because all the teachers who were brought in there were—how shall I say it? They followed a very restrictive—they would be called ultra right wing. There were no liberals in the group. Susanville was a very ingrown community. Everybody, I learned to my sorrow, was related to everyone else. The only evidences of a *Peyton Place* existence were on Saturday nights when they would have dances at the Grange. I have never experienced anything quite like those dances. People went there and they were never successful unless they finally wound up in a tremendous free-for-all. Oh, they just got so polluted, so smashed on these Saturday nights. And there would usually be a supper that would be served at midnight, or something or other. The Grange hall was, as I recall, fifteen miles or so out of town, Out in nowhere. Otherwise, they led

very respectable, Methodist existences in the community.

Everybody was either a Methodist or a Mormon on the faculty, except me; I was a Roman Catholic. The Catholic church was a pretty ratty, little, run-down [laughing] place compared to the other churches in that community. I think most of the parishioners were immigrants who worked in the mills—a number of Mexicans, Italians, and French people. But the upper classes of Susanville were heavily Methodist.

The community had sort of a stifling influence on me. As I said, I was a youngster. And it was in the days of Prohibition. We lived in a hotel. I think I loathed it so much because I was so young; I couldn't break into the social existence of the other teachers. They were older than I was. Most of them were married. I lived in the St. Francis Hotel. There were about six or eight teachers who lived in the hotel, and that became our sort of little club—never really got to know any people in the community. They just weren't interested particularly in the activities of their teachers, except what they were doing with their children in the classroom. It was a community in which children were bussed in from as far as thirty miles away, so they were not around after school so that you couldn't always use them in activities at night. We had rather long days, and we'd have an activity period after school and work with them at that time.

I don't know whether there's anything more I can say. I did think that the Susanville schools in many respects were more progressive at that time than the Reno schools were. California has always been a little bit ahead. They have pioneered a lot. I enjoyed that phase of it in that I did have a good supervisor, Mrs. [Lysle] Trabert, who had Reno connections. She was a native Nevadan, the head of the English

department, and she was a sympathetic person to whom I could spill out my troubles, 'cause I did—I was carrying a pretty heavy load, teaching load.

I used to get out of town every weekend I didn't have a play in rehearsal. And I'd make that eighty-seven-mile drive into Reno; then I'd go back on Sunday nights, and the end of the world had arrived. And for many, many years, I could never shake that awful feeling of Sunday night-Monday start of another week of teaching.

So I stayed in Susanville, which incidentally, was a very—I don't know how I can say it. It was an experience that, even now, in my sixties, I have nightmares in which I am returning to Susanville to teach. That's how much I disliked it. And that's the worst thing I can think of, is to be condemned to a life of teaching in Susanville High School. But I stuck it out. I was getting paid. I think I was making three hundred dollars more a year than anybody teaching in Reno at the time. That was one of the things that attracted me to the California schools. And at the end of three years, I had *had* it. And I quit. Along with the fact that by 1933, the Depression had hit Susanville so completely, and it was a one-industry town. There were two box factories in Susanville; they made wooden crates for the fruit, packing fruit. And they closed down, and poverty really hit the town. They were hard hit. And then the end of my third year, they notified all the teachers that their salary was going to be cut considerably if they wanted to stay, and they had to cut back on the number of teachers, and so on. And I thought, "This is a sign. Now is your chance to make your mark." So I quit, and I thought I had left teaching forever.

As I say, I finally left for southern California, determined that I was going to make my mark in the theater. I had been

down in Los Angeles, had gone through summer school, because I still had to go to school during the summer in order to keep my credential in effect. I decided at that time that I might just as well work toward a master's degree. So I transferred from UC to USC because USC was the only university on the West Coast that was offering an MA in drama. I went down there; I went two full summers, I believe.

The faculty of USC at the time was not terribly distinguished. The head of the department was primarily a speech debate man. Their drama department was not too strong. But I did have one course one summer under Frederick Koch, who was from the Carolina Playmakers. And he had made a reputation for himself, developing the Carolina Playmakers, and developing native drama. In other words, his classes in playwriting wrote about their own personal experiences, their own region. They were not to write about things that were in another section of the country, or something to which they were not closely related. And I did take a course from him at USC. I found it a rather stimulating experience, and I fiddled around with a little bit of playwriting, but I was not cut out for that sort of thing. I made some outlines for stories.

When I quit in Susanville, I wasn't sure just what I was going to do. I spent a summer in San Francisco working at the Owl Drug Company, which, at that time, was in receivership, and my brother was a receiver working on it. So I went down there trying to make up my mind what I was going to do. I came to Reno on a weekend, and I had a friend that I had met in the Bay area, and two of us were talking, and my brother Lawrence's partner, George Edler, said, "why don't you go down and see Boulder Dam?"

And I said, "Why?"

He said, "Oh, you ought to see the activity. I just came back from there. There's a lot of activity." He said, "Here, boys, if you want to go." He handed us a couple of twenty-dollar bills.

And I turned to—the fellow's name was Parker Favier, and I said, "Parker, let's go."

So we went to Las Vegas, and we decided that on our way back, we would come back through Los Angeles. I got to Los Angeles, met some friends through this Parker that he knew down there, I think a fraternity brother from Oregon. I met this boy. And Parker went back to Alameda where he lived, and I stayed in Los Angeles. Through this contact, I met some people who were graduates of the UCLA drama department, and I got involved in a drama group. We were trying to get a theater started. We went to a drama school together, we went to La Jolla and explored the possibilities of starting a community theater, and then we went to Laguna Beach, found that somebody had been to Laguna Beach ahead of us, and [laughing] we had no chance there. Then we went back to Hollywood and thought we would try and find some abandoned building in which we could start a theater. Nothing happened.

My savings were beginning to run a little low, and so I was going to a rental library. In those days (this is the Depression year, in '33), the chief entertainment at that time was renting a book for two or three cents a day. And there was a lending library at Third and Kenmore that was most attractive. It was prettier than any other lending library I had ever seen. And the girl who ran the place was a beautiful blonde; I'd say she was in her late twenties or early thirties. And I just thought that was the greatest library. One day I was saying, "Gee, I'd sure like to own a library like this."

She says, "Well, why don't you buy it?"



And I said, "Well, I don't think I c—" I said "That's ridiculous." I said, "I'm going to get into the movie business." That was when I was writing, and I was using every contact I could think of to try to get into something in the movies. And then I figured, well, I could buy this library and make enough to be able to write on the side, or else go into acting classes and work with some of those drama groups, like the Pasadena Playhouse, at night.

So she was certainly—she seemed to live a very nice life. She had a lovely apartment. So I bought the place. I borrowed the money, bought the rental library—and brother, did I buy a lemon! Because I didn't know that she was the mistress of one of the leading English movie actors. This library was a front for her [laughing]. And she was not living off the receipts from [laughing] that library!

But it did have a great big, vacant area in back of the store. And I fixed that up and lived there for seven or eight months. I went steadily and deeper and deeper into debt, but I did meet and run around with a group of people who were really theater-minded. And they all had a lot of talent. They'd all been very active in UCLA. I used to go out there and see some of the shows that were presented out on the campus. (And from that connection, I eventually met Rankin Mansfield in New York City. This is the way these things work. I brought him out to Reno, and he was out here the four years that I was in the service.)

It was a pleasant, relaxed few months, not at all profitable [laughing] financially, as I had explained to you. But I was trying desperately at the time to try to get into the theater business through the motion pictures. But it happened to be in the depths of the Depression, and there were just no opportunities for anyone to crash the inner circle. As I say, I took advantage of the opportunity to strengthen contacts. I did a little work in a drama school. I looked around

the Pasadena Playhouse. And also, I was working on a master's thesis at the University of Southern California. And I did get that finished and accepted and completed in 1934. My thesis was on the history of the professional theater in Nevada.\* And that necessitated a lot of research at the University of Nevada Library and from the Bancroft Library at University of California, Berkeley. I went through all of the newspapers of the period to find what plays were running and where, and what theaters were in operation for what period of time, and so on. Primarily, it was Virginia City, Carson City, and Reno. It was rather an interesting experience, and I enjoyed it thoroughly.

In the spring of '34, I could see that I was not making any progress in any direction in southern California, and I had an opportunity to sell my lending library to a competitor on nothing down [laughing] and so much a month, when she had it. And so I took any chance to get out of that. So I sold it to her. And I prepared to come back up to Nevada.

In the mail, out of the blue, I got a notice that I had been accepted as an educational director for the CCC project, which FDR had in full swing about this time. I was told to report on such and such a date (it was in May, I believe, of '34), to report to Sacramento to sign the necessary forms, and I would be given instructions where to go. This whole thing came out of the blue, since I had not applied, and I didn't even know there was such a thing as an Educational Director, and I had vowed I would never get into teaching again.

But the timing was right. I was leaving Los Angeles and I was on my way to Reno, and I could just stop right by in Sacramento,

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\*Copy in Special Collections Department, University of Nevada, Reno, Library.

and I did, and I found out that somehow or other, somebody—to this day, I'll never know (who)—had submitted my name. And so I got the job as educational director of the CCC camp in Hawthorne, Nevada.

I drove back to Reno, went out to Hawthorne, and I found that it was not regular classroom work, but consisted primarily of on-job training and trying to test all of the young men and see where they were as far as their education was concerned, to help them get into correspondence courses. Some of them were just learning to read. Some of them were learning to write. Some of them were college graduates; they were interested in getting into something else. So I helped them sign up for correspondence courses. And then, some of them got on-the-job training because we had civilian employees, some of whom knew blacksmithing, and some of them who knew auto mechanics, and so on. And I tried to start classes.

It meant that twice a week, I would walk up to a spur camp, which was five miles up Mt. Grant, which overlooks Walker Lake. And that was quite a rugged hike because you couldn't get up there any other way than either on horseback or hoofing it. So I really had to put in a little effort to get up there. One of my classes was bridge; it was one of the most popular [laughing] of the classes.

I determined while I was out there that I was going to take a crack at getting started in the theater. I did a little work out in Hawthorne. We worked up some reviews and some programs for the fellows. And we wrote the skits and made the costumes, and we have one full-fledged performance in the theater in Hawthorne, to which all the townspeople came. It established a pretty good relationship between the camp and the townspeople.

I bought some lighting equipment that I saw advertised. I think I spent a total of a

hundred and twenty-five dollars, and I figured if I ever got started in Reno, we would be needing some lighting equipment. So I was buying the stuff for the future. I was out there approximately sixteen months or so.





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## THE RENO LITTLE THEATER: FOUNDING AND EARLY YEARS, 1935-1941

In the spring of '35, I decided that the time had come when it was now or never. We'd better start a little theater. And so on my trips into Reno on weekends, I went around and contacted some of my former associates on the Nevada campus, those who had been interested in theater, to see if they would be interested in banding together and trying to start a community theater.

There had been several attempts to get a community theater going; none of them had been successful. I think that one of them got to the point where she gave a pageant. It was a Mrs. Joan Southworth, who was French and had a background in French theater. I don't know just exactly what it was, but she tried to get something going here, but her ideas were not particularly practical. And outside of this one abortive pageant, which embodied a number of Indian legends (as I recall, it was a mixture of Indian and biblical), it was not too successful, and there was really nothing that you could call a community theater at the time.

The University drama department had dropped considerably in influence in the community due to the fact that the Depression was on. They couldn't put on a full-fledged program, and there wasn't the demand any longer. And they didn't have the dynamo running things that they'd had during the late twenties.

I got together, I believe, twelve people who were, say, the charter members of the Reno Little Theater. We had such pressing problems as what we were going to call the thing, how many plays we were going to give, where we were going to give them. I think the most important problem was where we were going to give our plays because there wasn't any place in town that was suitable. We had no money to go into any sort of a building or remodeling program. The nature of this country was such that you couldn't go into a barn without adequate heat, so it meant that we had to more or less shift for ourselves. We had no finances at all. Our only assets were these few pieces of lighting equipment that

I had managed to scrounge. I also had a few rheostats that I bought second- or thirdhand. We were planning to use them whenever we found a place to give a show.

We met several times during the summer of 1935. And I think probably at this time I should try to remember the charter members. There was Mrs. Brussard, Evelyn Brussard; Blythe Bulmer; Dick Hillman; Randall Ross; my sister, Grace; Margaret Martin Bankofier; I think Ray Frohlich, and there were a couple of other people, but I'm not too sure. I think there was a Doris Shaver from Sparks. That is something that I could check because I think I turned our original bylaws over to the University.\* Don Harvey Bell was, I know. Somewhere at the University, there are, as I say, the original bylaws, and they're signed in the back with the original twelve charter members. Well, the whole thing is more—I guess it's unimportant, anyway. Although, of that group, there're at least six or eight of them who were in a number of productions that lasted several seasons. Blythe, of course, holds the all-time record. Oh, [William C.] Bill Miller was a charter member, of the University drama department.

We decided on our first production, *Three Cornered Moon*, by a Gertrude (and I've never forgotten this name) Tonkonogy. It was a comedy, a family comedy, about the Depression. And we picked it because it was funny, and also because the requirements of the cast fit this nucleus that we had. We decided that we would settle on our first play and decide when we would give it, and then try to find a place where we could give it.

I went to Dr. Clark, who was president of the University, and asked for permission to use the Education Auditorium, where we had performed for so many years under the banner of Campus Players. He gave us permission to put on our first show, but

no more, because he didn't want us to get involved too deeply because that education auditorium was used for so many things. It was also used for the University productions. He wanted to encourage us.

Mrs. Clark was a help to us. She, at that time, was just organizing the Community Concert Association. So the two of us were working in sort of a similar direction, and she was magnificent, as far as the moral support that she gave us in getting started.

We, of course, had no season ticket plan. We had just figured that we'd go along from play to play. We announced in our first publicity that we would give six plays during our first season, which, in itself, was an ambitious announcement, I think, as I look back on it. We never specified exactly where we were giving them.

But we did open with *Three Cornered Moon* for two nights at the education auditorium sometime in mid-October of 1935. I had to build all of the scenery, didn't have too much help except for my father, who was retired, and he was pretty handy. And so he and I built all of the flats, the first flats that became the property of the Little Theater. There was a dance hall above the Sears Roebuck building on Sierra Street. My father owned the building. The dance hall had been vacant for many months, many years, so we had a chance to utilize all of that space. There was only one drawback. The ceiling was so low in the dance hall that we could never stand our flats up. So we never knew what the set was going to look like until we moved it out and stood it up on the stage. So everything was built on the floor, on the flat, and then we just stored 'em

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\*See Reno Little Theater records, Special Collections Department, UNR Library.

because we couldn't put them together to see how they fit. When the proper time came, we moved everything out in a borrowed truck. We moved it to the University and set up the set to see what it looked like. It required a certain number of changes. But we were opened on time, and we had beaten the bushes and strong-armed all of our relatives and friends, and we had a pretty good turnout. We had the problem of getting not only the cast and the backstage crew, but we also had to get a front house crew, with a business manager and all that sort of thing. But as I say, we got a very fine response. We had pretty close to packed houses for the two nights.

And so we were able to announce our second production, which was a modern comedy, called *Goodbye Again* (November, 1935]. And that had to do with the problems of a writer who was making a personal appearance lecture tour across the country, and he was something of a Lothario. And it had to do with the difficulties that he got involved in.

For that production, we moved into the old Reno High School combination gymnasium-auditorium, which was downstairs. The set we built again in the dance hall. And we revamped our flats and repainted them. The set was one room in a hotel in Cleveland, I believe. It was supposedly on the twenty-second or twenty-third floor. And it really looked very good.

We had one really amusing situation happen in that there was a cat that lived on the Reno High School stage, and it was very much interested in our production, and insisted on wandering out on the stage. We were all trying to keep that cat from getting onto the stage (this was the opening night performance). And nothing would do. When somebody's back was turned, it just went trotting out onto the stage.

Helen Lewis was playing the lead. She afterwards went on to New York and became very successful in the counterpart of Betty Furness on the other network. She had had some local high school experience, and in the University, and also had been picked by Max Reinhart for his traveling production of *Midsummer Night's Dream*. So we could advertise her name, and she was an excellent actress.

She put the cat outside the door a number of times. One time, in a very dramatic scene, the cat came onstage again. So she picked him up, went over to the window and put the cat out. Now, this was supposed to be twenty-three stories above the street! It just brought down the most tremendous house! And I knew, at that moment, that any animals that are connected with a production are going to give you trouble. And my prediction bore fruit because some of my best stories, incidents that happened in the theater, had to do with animals that we used.

*Goodbye Again* was really quite successful, so we advertised as our third production a modern melodrama called *Post Road* [January, 1936]. It had to do with kidnapping, and it was set in an old inn on the Post Road between Boston and New York. We had to move out of the high school. So we went, then, to the State Building, which was located in Powning Park. There we faced the fact that we had many, many problems to solve, but we talked with the Chamber of Commerce, who at that time had the control of the auditorium, and we were told that we could use it if we booked our shows far enough [in] advance that we didn't conflict, first of all, with the National Guard, which had priority on Monday and Tuesday nights every week. so we knew that we could do nothing on those two nights, except that if they weren't having a drill, we might possibly get in there

early and get our sets put up. We were also given permission to bring our scenery in on Sunday, and then we'd set it up on Sunday afternoon and then I could work on Monday 'cause I was the only one that had any time to do this technical work. Then on Monday, we could meet again, on Monday night, and if the National Guard was drilling, we could work backstage on the sets, and when they got out (which could be anywhere from nine-thirty or ten to eleven or eleven-thirty), then we could have our rehearsal. We rehearsed Monday and Tuesday, and then Wednesday and Thursday we had it to ourselves. And then Friday and Saturday, we gave our performances. At this time we were only giving two performances of each production.

The State Building had absolutely no lighting equipment, just a little switchboard with tumbler switches offstage. The stage, itself, I think was ten feet from the curtain to the back wall, and in the middle of the back wall was a window, which made it very awkward, as far as sets go. If it'd just been a plain, blank, white wall, we could've used it and lit it as a cyc. But it had this window sticking in the middle of it. It had red velvet front curtains which were hung back from the footlights about six or seven feet. Then there were steps that went up on either side that went up onto the stage which formed sort of a lecture platform in front of the front curtain. Behind the front Curtain, there was no access to the stage except from two doors which were in the very back, upper left and upper right. Then they went down a flight of steps into a room on either side of the stage. There were absolutely no bathroom facilities or anything—nothing was available. We couldn't go down the back to get out of the building because you went down into the Washoe County Library, which was downstairs. That meant that everybody had to get there before the audience arrived and stay

backstage until the show was over. So we had to devise all kinds of gimmicks in order to get around this particular situation. As there was no way of controlling the house lights from backstage, we had to work out a system of signals whereby somebody was posted by the switchboard out in the auditorium. And when we gave the signal, they went and pulled all these tumbler switches and turned out lights, one by one, and then worked in reverse when each act was over.

The very first show was really a problem because we were faced with all these things at once. As I say, there was no lighting equipment, so that's when we built a portable switchboard which was—oh, it just seemed to weigh tons. We would bring that up, and then we would have to string all of our wires and put in all of our lighting equipment. We'd have to take down the set of drapes which were on stage. They were a violent orange. You can imagine the orange drapes with the red velour front curtains! All this stuff had to be moved down, and then we'd have to set up a rigging and bring our flats in. We had to modify our sets because the stage was so shallow there was no way of getting across backstage from one side of the stage to the other.

So that very first play, we had part of the set out in front of the curtain and part behind it, and we started the show by having two of the principal characters coming out, and we had some furniture out there, and they sat. The husband read the newspaper, and the wife did her knitting. That way, we got some of the people out. And we took advantage of the drawback of not being able to put the whole set onto the stage. Then when the play opened, we cut the house lights, brought up the stage lights, and opened the curtains, and the action went on.

It worked pretty well, but it was a tremendous amount of work because all of

this equipment had to be hauled up two flights of stairs. There was a flight of stairs outside and a flight of stairs inside because we were on the second floor in the auditorium. And it was just a man-killing job! There was more perspiration than inspiration that went into those early productions, believe me!

I had to round up volunteers to come out on Sunday morning, early, because we had to borrow a truck since we couldn't afford to rent one. I had to borrow a truck from a local trucking company, and it was only available on Sundays. And in most cases, I had to go around and rout, literally, these people out of bed and get them to come on down and help in the job of hauling everything up and then putting the set together. It usually took the greater part of Sunday, or up into Sunday night, just to get the stuff hauled up there. And then there was the job [of] putting it into place. When the show was over on Saturday night, we usually had an aftercast party, and then Sunday morning, we had to go through the whole thing in reverse and take everything down, move it out, hang the drapes back up, and get the auditorium back the way we had found it. It was a tremendous job!

But the first play seemed to draw pretty well. We had problems with the acoustics. The balcony—I don't know whether you are familiar with that place, but the balcony was so shallow that you had trouble seeing the stage if you were too far back. So we tried to use only the front part of the balcony. At various times, we hung drapes from the balcony down to the floor, main floor, and tried to put all the seats in front of those drapes so that we could get the audience closer to the stage and they wouldn't feel as if they were in a barn. We were trying to preserve some feeling of intimacy. The very construction of the auditorium was such that with our low-powered, inexpensive lighting equipment, we were unable to really

light our production as well as we wanted to. It just wasn't feasible because the balcony was so far back that we had to have high-powered lighting equipment, which we couldn't afford.

But we managed to get through and finished our first season in the State Building. Always a hassle with the janitor over one problem or another; the fact that we left the door unlocked, or something of the sort, or the place was dirty, and—oh, we always had something that bothered us. Then we decided we would start agitating for certain improvements backstage. We managed to get through the first season without making any major revisions in the auditorium or the stage itself. We gave, I think, in that first year *Cradle Song* [March, 1936], which was a costume production, and then we gave a number called *Oliver, Oliver*. It was supposedly a drawing room comedy, but it was pretty awful. We changed the title of it, but that still didn't help the play any. And then we wound up with the production of *The Trial of Mary Dugan*, which we did pretty much on a bare stage and just tried to give the impression of a courtroom. The whole play took place in a courtroom, and that was the closest we came to actually duplicating a courtroom, with just leaving the bare stage, taking the drapes down, and just putting up a judge's bench and jury box, and so on. So we got through the first year.

I think it was at the end of the first year that we got the WPA to assist in doing some work to improve the backstage area. They cut big double doors down right and left, behind the curtain line onstage, so that we could get in onto the stage from downstage as well as upstage, using the original doors. In the two rooms that opened onto the stage, they put in a balcony so that you could walk directly from the balcony out onto the stage. During our first year, you'd walk up this flight of steps to enter the stage, and if you walked off the



stage, you dropped down a flight of stairs, which was a little bit awkward. That way, with a balcony on either side (it was six or eight feet wide), we were able to store furniture that was needed for a set, set changes, and so on.

Then the WPA put in wired outlets up on the stage so that we could put in our own lighting equipment and connect our switchboard with the outlets on the stage. Our switchboard was worked over by Emerson Wilson, the attorney here. He took that over as his hobby, and he did a wonderful job of making a portable board for us at the minimum of cost. That board was most important in our lighting facilities.

We also picked up here and there various bits of scenery. There was a man who moved to Reno, and he had had a little theater group in San Francisco and wound up with a couple of trunks of scenery which he had no use for, and he donated 'em to us. The most valuable item, I can remember, was a pale blue cyclorama which we used for many, many productions.

I might add that between the first season and our second season, we had the benefit of a temporary visitor to Reno, Sylvia Reagan, who worked for the Theater Union in New York City. She was out here for a divorce. And, of course, most people who've worked in theater, when they go to a new community, always look to see if there's another theater in existence. She heard about our activities, and she came out and spent her six weeks reorganizing our whole organization, helping us draw up, to incorporate as a nonprofit corporation. We had a set of bylaws in which she just spelled out the duties of the various members of the board of directors and the duties of the director and the business manager and the stage manager, and all this sort of thing—everything was spelled out, and became a standing operating procedure

for us. Sylvia was a tremendous help to us, and also suggested plays that were available. She afterwards turned her hand toward playwriting and wrote two plays which were produced with considerable success on Broadway. But she's dropped out. I don't know what's happened to her since then.

Let's see, some of the other people who were involved in this first season—as you noticed, we leaned heavily on the alumni from the University. We had Dorothy States, and let's see—and Beverly Beger. They both were of the University of Nevada. Dorothy had been quite active in drama. Her father had been a former mayor of Reno. And family friends of hers were Ethel Zimmer and Maude Dimmick. Ethel Zimmer was a music teacher; Maude Dimmick was a widow in comfortable circumstances. Both of them were daughters or granddaughters of the [M. C.] Lake who founded Lake's Crossing which became Reno. We used them as a nucleus to form our women's advisory committee because they did have excellent contacts in the community.

And this was one of the suggestions that was advanced by Sylvia Reagan during the summer after our first season, in which she suggested ways and means in which we could work our way into the community and become an integral part of the cultural activities. Her suggestion was that we form this committee, the advisory committee of women, whose purpose was to help promote the Little Theater. We formed a representative group of fifteen or twenty, as I recall. And we picked them deliberately because they were representatives of various organizations, various church groups around in the community, and their job was to promote the Little Theater. They helped in the sale of season tickets. We gave programs and had regular meetings to which they came, and we kept them abreast of what we were doing in

the theater, what our financial problems were, what we were tryin' to do artistically, and they really went out and worked with their own groups and helped promote us.

I think it was one of the most successful things we did. I think it sort of disappeared and declined with the coming of the war. The need was not so great because we had expanded our base of activity. We had more people in the organization, and we had begun to develop a following in the community. And I think that's probably one of the areas where we possibly made a mistake. We should probably have continued with that advisory group and maybe expanded it, and brought more men, possibly husbands, into the organization.

In our first years, we tried to develop a one-act—an original playwriting contest. We sponsored a one-act play contest throughout the state, and we promised the winning three plays—or the winning four plays (I can't remember which now)—a production at the end of our regular season. At first blush, this might not seem to be a very ambitious project. But as we got into it, we found that we were really undertaking something that required a tremendous amount of work. We had all of the advance publicity to get out around the state to try to interest people who might have a yen toward playwriting. We knew we were going to have a lot of scripts submitted that were completely worthless, but we hoped that among a few of them there would be some that would be worth producing. We had promised a production of the three winners, so we had to do them, whether they were good, bad, or indifferent.

We were very fortunate in those first two years. I'm not sure that we continued it beyond our second year. It seems to me we had only two of them. But I found that I was so involved, after having given a full season

of plays, that I didn't have the strength to go on and present a bill of three one-act plays because it required all of these additional people, all these people to assist in the directing, and usually three different sets. And we didn't have the drawing power of having them on our regular bill of plays. We did discover some rather good plays, and I felt that every one that we gave a production to was worthy.

Among the winners, we had one of them that presented the plight of the local Indians. It was written by, I believe, the wife of the director of the Stewart Indian school. We had one of them that was written in sort of free verse by a University of Nevada student who had a very fine literary bent; it was a good job. We had one, it was sort of a courtroom melodrama, submitted by Dr. N. B. Joseph, who was one of our first enthusiastic members and supporters. There was another rather clever one-act that I remember that was written by Helen McGinnis, who is still in Reno, but I guess she's given up writing plays. One of those first winning plays featured (he is now judge; he's on the Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco) Judge [Charles] Merrill. He did a very fine job for us.

Our second year, our first production was *Blind Alley*. That was a melodrama, had to do with kidnappers who moved into a house and took over, literally captured the—it was a professor and his wife and a child. And they held them prisoner in their own home. It's a situation that has been duplicated since, many times in TV, and in other stage productions. The head gangster was a young man who was called a boy bandit, or something. And he was a killer, and the other leading character was played by Don Harvey Bell. The professor was a psychologist, and he worked on this boy and finally got him into a state of collapse by discovering what the kinks were in—his

subconscious personality was very much out of whack.

It was a good play, and it did very well. The boy bandit was played by Rhea Stone, who was a senior in Reno High School, did an excellent job. He played in a number of Little Theater productions, and after an absence of some thirty years, he came back two or three years ago and appeared in several productions for us. One of 'em was *The Amorous Flea*, in which we played the lead. That was a musical based on Moliere's *School for Wives*.

Then I think we decided in our second year that six plays were too many for us to handle, and we cut down to five plays. We were trying to do at least one play of extreme, shall we say, social significance, or else extreme literary quality, a number of comedies (the majority of plays would be comedies), we wanted to do at least one costume play a year, and one drama. We chose as our second big production of the second year *Elizabeth the Queen* because it happened to be a favorite of mine (I like Maxwell Anderson), and we seemed to have a number of people who were available for casting. My sister, Grace, had returned to Reno after being away at graduate school, and she played the role of Elizabeth. We had a number of people in the community who have—that was their first and last production. I remember Jack Cunningham was in that. He was one of the Beef Eaters. [Some other members of the cast were] James Hawkins, Mildred Gardner, Rhea Stone, Randall Ross, Emerson Wilson, Glenn Brandon played Essex, Jess Simpson, Al Schorr, Marguerite Brown, Muriel Holland, Rosamond Fuller, Jack Butler, Graham Gorman (Graham is over at the bank here; I forgot that he was in that production), Palmer Collings, Dale Newton, Lowell Nugent (Lowell Nugent was in O'Brien-Rogers; he was a mortician. And he couldn't've been any more far afield than he

was there. But he was a wonderful character. He was a big man, blond, and just a great type for casting, and he was very enthusiastic and extremely competent).

We had a tremendous cast. We had a huge costume problem. But since it was still Depression (these were Depression times), we were able to get very handsome costumes, rented from San Francisco. And we had a very beautiful production. To get everybody backstage was something of a problem because we had no way of getting backstage except through the auditorium. So we solved that. We had accompanying music on the Hammond organ. It was played by Irene Peterson, who used to be a church organist in Reno for years and taught piano. She played the Hammond organ, and we had as an opening a royal processional march with everybody going down the aisle from the rear of the auditorium down up onto the stage, and then out backstage, so we got everybody back there so all were ready when the action started.

We were already attracting many unusual types, people who came to Reno. One girl (Mildred Gardner) who played one of the leading ladies-in-waiting was a girl here for a divorce, a very charming person. And she contributed much to the success of the production.

We had a young man who showed up for tryouts. He was supposedly from Hollywood, and he had all kinds of credentials, according to him. I started him by having him read the principal role of Essex, and gradually moved him down, trying to find something that suited his capacity. He was such an obnoxious person that I knew I would have to put him somewhere in a very minor role. And he wound up being the prologue, with a special prologue written for him by Don Harvey Bell. Opening night, we decided we'd spend



the money and get him a costume; he could be another one of the court attendants in the later scenes. So opening night, he came out in his tights and delivered his prologue, and then he went backstage, and he burst into tears. I found later that some practical jokers in the cast had put itching powder in his tights [laughing]. He was enough of an actor to realize [laughing] he had to go through with it. But he was in great physical torment all the time he was out in front. And he literally cried backstage. And I had to agree with him and sympathize with him because I just couldn't let the thing get out of hand.

But we had a very handsome production of *Elizabeth the Queen*, and I think it was worth all of the work involved. and the many sets. The sets that we finally used were designed by Henrietta McElroy, who was a talented young woman. Let's see, her mother worked here at the Internal Revenue Service; her aunt was a concert pianist who gave piano lessons. They lived up on the corner of the lot where Gray Reid's is now located, and there's a service station there. They lived in a little house there. And Henrietta was artistically inclined and very clever, and she designed the sets for us, afterwards moved back East and worked as a commercial artist.

In the middle of our first season (I think it was during the third production, which was *Post Road*), we had an opportunity to rent an old house (it was sort of a two-flat house) up at 20 Winter Street. It was owned by the American Savings and Loan, which was organized by August Frohlich, who (I don't know, whether then or later) was mayor of this city. But they had this old house, and it was repossessed, and he hadn't had anything else to do with it, so we rented it for twenty dollars a month, as I recall. However, there were certain catches to it. It had a great big living room downstairs and a dining room. we

acquired this in December [1935]. I remember it because we had a Christmas party in which everybody was to bring some furniture, donate some furniture to the place so we could have something to sit on, tables, and that sort of thing. The drawback of the house was that the roof leaked everywhere, and whenever it rained, there was just a steady stream of water coming down. And there was no way to heat the place, and all of the plumbing was frozen. It was a winter comparable to the one we're having right now [1971]. For long periods of time, I just disregarded the fact that we just didn't have any water in it. And we had no—the bathrooms we just padlocked. Finally, that situation got rather intolerable, so I borrowed blowtorches and I would thaw out the pipes underneath (and they just leaked all over) to get enough water running so we could use the bathroom, get water to mix the scene paint to paint the scenery, and so on. There, too, we were limited and unable to set our sets up. We had to do everything in the flat. The house served its purpose, however, in that it gave us a sense of being. We had a place to meet regularly; it was our own; we had a rehearsal place that was our own. And we called it "The Studio," and we had a sign out, of course, and we were very pleased to have such a place.

But at the end of this first year, when spring finally came and I could stop thawing out pipes, we felt that we had to go into something better. And we ran across a brick building that was in an alley between Third Street, Fourth Street, Sierra, and West. I think the building is still standing, and it's in the back of a motel. It was a small, solid brick building. That was used as a candy factory and as a potato chip factory. And it was two stories and a basement. We couldn't afford to rent the place. I think our rent was forty-five dollars a month. We couldn't afford the rent for the entire building, so we rented out the basement

to the Hinckley Tire Service Company, of which I was a part-time bookkeeper during my first year. That was the way I was able to support myself. My brother and Wayne Hinckley owned the Hinckley Tire Service; they were distributors for Goodrich tires. And they needed additional storage space, so we stored all of the truck tires in the basement of this building. And thereby, we got enough rent to take care of the rest of the building. But unfortunately, since I was tied in with the Hinckley Tire Service as bookkeeper and had a key to the building, I was called at all odd hours to help move these truck tires out of the basement. And it meant shuffling them back and forth. And they're heavy, I tell you! And there were these big steel doors on the alley that we opened up, and we'd wrestle the tires out. But we did have the upstairs completely unobstructed, and we put in a low stage for rehearsal. We couldn't afford to put in a ceiling because it was an open loft, so we used heavy building paper and covered it in so it made it a little warmer. We had donated one of these great, big stoves with the isinglass all around. And that thing heated the upstairs, after a fashion. And we had a part of the main floor downstairs, which we used for our shop, to build scenery and props and so on. The other half was filled with tires.

That was our second year, and we stayed there until 1941, when we moved into our present building. But we moved everything from that building to the State Building for five and a half years. We had some wonderful times there. It was around this time that one of our volunteer workers was Mrs. Walter Tobin. Walter Tobin was the president of the Security National Bank, and Mrs. Tobin had worked with various theater groups in the East. She came in and was of tremendous help as the season ticket drive chairman and an organizer. As a result of Sylvia Reagan's

planning, we started our second year with a season ticket drive, guaranteeing five productions for five dollars. And that way, we didn't have to go out and sell tickets for each production, because that was a tremendous job to ask of any cast, small group, such as we were. By this time, however, we picked up many additional members and we had a little bigger organization.

We had a number of parties in this studio on 340 West Street—340 1/2 West Street, I guess it was. And the Tobins, both Mrs. Tobin and Walter, were a great help to us in our financial problems. And eventually, because of Mr. Tobin and Mrs. Tobin's interests, we were able to get our first loan from a bank. We weren't a very good risk, but they knew what we were doing, and they had confidence in us. And we have remained customers of the Security Bank ever since.

Our first play in which we toured was *Blind Alley*, which we took to Virginia City, and we played in an old hall up there, which has since been torn down—not because we played there, but it was just because it was ready to fall. That was our first venture out of town. Then we went, also, to Fallon, where we gave a production of *Another Language*. We gave that in the theater down there, the movie theater. And we took a production of *Room Service* to Susanville, and, we also took a production of *The Last Mile* to Carson City.

In Carson City, we played in the high school gymnasium. We went over on a Sunday and set up our sets, and we were to play on Monday night and then come back into Reno for our Friday and Saturday performances. We had a big stage over there, which was an improvement over the one that we were using here in the State Building. So we went over on a Sunday, spent the full day getting our set up, and then we went through and had a dress rehearsal Sunday night, and came

home. The next morning, I got a phone call in which they said one of those violent wind storms had come up and blown the roof off the gymnasium. If we wanted to give a play, we would be more or less giving an outdoor performance, and this was in March. There was nothing else to do but go over and give the performance, and we got the word out to people to be sure to wear coats because it was impossible to heat the gymnasium.

The play was a grim tragedy of prison life. We had six cells in condemned row, and I think the climax of the first act was the execution of a young prisoner. The second act had to do with a prison break. We had all these cells built. And it represented a fantastic amount of work.

We went over and we gave the production. And I must give the Carson City audiences credit. They shivered through [laughing] a very “shivery” play, I might say.

Then we came back with that production and put it on the stage, and something had happened to my measurements because the set was too big and wouldn’t fit on the Reno stage, so we had to cut it down. So our cells were considerably smaller than even the worst prison to be found [laughing] in the United States!

I think the production of *Room Service* [February, 1941] was the last one that we took touring until three years ago. We were so involved with our production schedule that it just seemed impossible for us to find time to go out into the nearby communities, although one of our aims was to build up an audience in the towns that surrounded Reno. And we did have, and still have, a number of season ticket holders who come from nearby communities.

You know, I want to go back, if I may, to tell another rather amusing incident that happened in the old State Building when we

were doing a play called *Romance* [1938], which was an old chestnut that had to do with the triumphant American appearance of an Italian opera star. And it was rather a florid production, typical of the early turn of the century drama. I can’t think of the name of the author. [Edward Sheldon] It was his major success. In fact, it was the only real play that he ever wrote. And he became an invalid shortly after he wrote the play, and was confined to a wheelchair, and never wrote anything more. But this play was a really tremendous success! And it was played up and down across the country, and we wanted to do it. It had four sets, and it was really an ambitious production for us to do.

One of the big scenes was a reception—or, rather, it was almost a torchlight rally outside the balcony room of the opera star. And there was lots of cheering and all this going on, and lots of colored lights—all that sort of stuff. And for the occasion we had gotten different colors of smoke powder and different colors of flares (I think it was colored magnesium of some kind). And we put them in a biscuit tin, which had ten compartments, and we’d put a different color in each one. And we were going to light each one separately.

Unfortunately, we had it sitting on the floor, and the stage area was so cramped backstage that somebody came along and kicked it so that the powder went all over, and when we lit it the first time, the whole thing ignited. And so we had this tremendous colored fire outside. It almost looked as if the whole building were burning down. But unfortunately, it went up in a hurry, and we had to keep this fire going for several minutes to go through several scenes. So I kept saying to our stagehand, “Add a little more! Keep on! Add a little more!”

So he kept adding this powder onto the tin, and we kept it going through the

necessary scene. Then all at once, I looked up—and the State Building had a very low ceiling over the stage. And up about—from about eight feet above the stage floor, clear to the ceiling, it was one thick block of smoke, the most bitter-smelling smoke you have ever encountered! And we, the cast, were already beginning to worry and tried to keep from coughing. And they did their valiant best, believe me! Those onstage were tryin’ to throw me frantic signals that we’d better cut out that smoke from offstage before we actually had everybody coughing.

That smoke moved Out into the auditorium, got the front row, and they started coughing. And it was a period of almost twenty minutes in which that smoke moved all the way back, upstairs, under the balcony, and got a new group. And they all coughed so that nobody knew, really, what went on in the play (laughing) during that period. It was just typical of some of the adventures we had when we were over there in the State Building.

Another one was a situation that occurred in connection with the first production of *Personal Appearance* [May, 1938], which we subsequently revived in 1954, I believe, when we got on our new stage, with Beatrice Kay in the leading role of the actress. It was a play that had been made into a motion picture starring Mae West.

Our first production introduced a newcomer to our ranks. She was [the] owner of a ladies’ dress shop here. And she did quite a fine job as an actress in her performance with the exception of one thing. On the second night, she showed up for the performance completely smashed! And I didn’t know it until the play had started. We were waiting and waiting because she made up at home and then came down and went right on the stage. So I wasn’t aware for some time, until after she made her first appearance—in fact, the

play opened with this curtain speech that she made out in front, supposedly on a personal appearance tour across the country.

And she got out in front of the curtain, and I heard her going on, and all at once, the *worths stharthed gethingh all shluhrred*, and she was having a *ghreat* deal of difficulty getting through. And I was standing right behind her, and I found it necessary to put my hands out against the curtain to keep her from failing back. And that’s when the horrible discovery came to me that *she was drunk*.

And then it was—panic reigned for the rest of the evening. We tried our best to figure out how we could cover for her. And we had somebody everywhere trying to throw her lines in case she went up. But the trouble was, everybody else went up in the lines except her. And she started throwing cues to the other people on stage in a voice that could be heard clear downstairs and out in Virginia Street, I swear. [Laughing] All the rest of the cast were thoroughly rattled by this time. And we got into the second act, and there was one scene in which she makes some passes at the young boy who was a service station attendant at this little hick town in Pennsylvania. Well, unfortunately, she got this boy on the couch, and the realism with which she was making passes at him was so great that he was practically undone, and it had everybody else backstage [laughing] all alarmed.

One of the character players that we had (her name was Venice Daniels) was standing next to me. And all at once, I turned around, and I saw she was in a nightgown. And I said, “What are you doing in a nightgown?”

She said, “I go on next.”

I said, “But you have a whole scene to play in your other dress!”

And she turned and flashed me one look of horror, pulled the nightgown right up over her head, right then and there, and threw on

the dress, and just managed to get on stage in time. And that was unquestionably the most catastrophic performance we have ever given, I swear! And I thought of that afterwards, when we did the revival of the show with Beatrice Kay, who was, believe me, difficult to work with. Since she was an old-time pro, she demanded certain prerogatives, which we gave her as much as possible. She gave a very flamboyant, but really, an excellent performance. But I've never been able to think of *Personal Appearance* without thinking of the first performance and the lady, who, incidentally, never again appeared in the Little Theater. And she didn't realize, when it was all over, what a dreadful experience we had all gone through. As far as she was concerned, it was beautiful. She was just completely relaxed in her performance.

I was tryin' to think of—one of the most ambitious productions we did in these early years [December, 1938] was an adaptation of the Greek trilogy, the Agamemnon trilogy. It was called *Daughters of Atreus*. It necessitated the designing and construction of all kinds of Greek costumes, from armor up through the various Greek maidens' costumes. At this point, we decided that we would try to make all of our own costumes so that we could build up a wardrobe. This was one of our most ambitious projects. We had a young man who was a local florist. His name was Jack—oh, left me. He was a clever artist, and he designed, made the forms on which we made all of the papier-mâché armor, the shin grieves and the breastplates and the helmets, and all that. We made the helmets from felt hats. We cut the brims off and stretched them and then soaked them in glue, and then applied papier-mâché over them, and buckram, and then made the big plumes. The horse tail plumes we made out of dyed rope. We had many parts of those costumes around for over thirty years. It

was a tremendous project and necessitated the time and patience of everybody in our organization. We had a young woman, her name was Lyla Whiteley. She was the wife of a druggist who was sort of the manager at Ramos Drug. And she was extremely talented in that she was a very competent artist, and she could not only design the costume and paint it, but she could cut it, too—make her own patterns and cut them, and supervise the sewing so that it looked just like the design. And we worked weeks on that thing. And it was really a beautiful production!

In order to get a little publicity, Claude La Belle, who was the drama critic for the *San Francisco News*, we arranged to have him come up. We paid his way (and these freeloaders would go anywhere, you know—they were goin' to get a hotel and meals and a trip to Reno). And he came up to review our production. We were in the State Building. We had bought extra lighting equipment. In fact, we just bought and borrowed lighting equipment from everywhere because it was an extremely ambitious production. And consequently, because of the complexity of it, we had many things happen.

Opening night—let's see. We gave that production three nights, as I recall. Mr. La Belle saw it on the second night, which was a Friday. But on Thursday night, the show was under way about five minutes, and I was watching from the wings, and I looked up, and I saw that half of the lighting was out. And I went back and turned to our board, and I discovered we were—there was great panic. And we tried to find out what had happened to the lighting. I knew that there was very complicated lighting coming up; we had a dawn and all this sort of stuff worked out that was essential later in the show. I knew that all was lost if we didn't find out what the trouble was. Well, we never did find out that



night what had happened to our board, but half of it was dead. It turned out afterwards that we had so overloaded the circuits there that we blew the fuses in the switchboard in the basement of the building. And there was nothing we could do. We couldn't get to it that night because the basement was locked and we didn't have the key. So we just had to make do. So we ran extension cords from the outlets in the two dressing rooms, and we ran them out into the light fixtures that we had on the stage and lit the show.

One of the key effects in the show was when the wind comes up, and the fleet can sail from—I forget, from Troy to wherever it was. I can't remember. (You know, this had to do with Paris running off with the queen.) And that was very important because the light had to come up on that flag, and you had to see it suddenly start waving. So we worked in panic trying to get an extension to the fan in time. And I can remember that when the time came for it, I was standing—we had the only cords left, and I had to hold the two of them together in order to make a contact [laughing] for the wind to come up and make it possible for the fleet to sail.

Some of the other things that happened in that particular production—because we had such a large cast, and because it was necessary to go from one side of the stage to the other, we built up the back part of the stage on platforms, and the cast went on their hands and knees across (we put rugs down on the floor), and they crawled on their hands and knees from one side of the stage to the other. And that, in itself, was a picture in the progress of that play, to see one group going this way [gesturing] and the other group coming the other way [gesture], to change places.

The play was divided into many scenes, and as I said, it had a large cast. I had literally

to scrape the barrel to get enough men to be in the show. One of the principal characters who was playing Achilles was a very handsome young man who worked as a clerk in the bank. He was not a particularly brilliant young man; neither was he a natural born actor. But he was a male, and he looked beautiful on stage in the Greek costume. And he had such a trouble as a clerk at the bank that he always had to work late to find his errors and to make up for his mistakes. So he always came and rehearsed after work; we rehearsed his scenes last. Well, I finally said, "Are you going to be able to get here in time for our play?"

He said, "Oh, sure." He said, "You don't have to worry. On the performance nights, I'll be here."

So we came to his first scene on the performance night, and I turned to him and I said, "Bill, go on. It's your scene."

He said, "Oh, no."

I said, "Go on. Go on. It's your cue."

He said, "Oh, no. I never go on 'til a quarter of eleven."

And that was the time we always rehearsed his scene.

We had another experience in connection with "Daughters of Atreus." We had to have trumpets. We had a small little phonograph that we used for sound effects, and I tried to find records. But this little phonograph was so small that you couldn't even hear anything, and I couldn't find any trumpet sounds that were particularly effective. So we decided that we would use live trumpets, two people on trumpets.

So I started with—I went to the musicians' union and found who all the trumpeters were. And I got the two best ones, and I arranged and I talked to them, and they promised that they would do this for nothing, and I tried to kid them along, that they were doing this for a great cause. So I had the two best, but

unfortunately, they got a job playing on the nights of our show, so they backed out. So then I got the next two, and I went on down the list during the rehearsal period. And it finally wound up that I had to go to the high schools and ask if they didn't have any people who could play the trumpet. And the band leader went through his list, and he said, "you have two girls who are dancers in your show, in the dance scenes, and they can handle it."

I said, "Well, that's great. They can double in brass, literally."

So this was dress rehearsal time, and we made arrangements for the girls to play certain numbers for the various calls, and we rehearsed it dress rehearsal night, and I guess they must've been seventeen—sixteen or seventeen years old. And they were very cute girls. They would finish their dance number and then come off to the side of the stage, and then I would give them the cue, and we had this all arranged. We didn't have any chance to rehearse from dress rehearsal night to the first performance. So everybody was all keyed up for the opening. And the command came, "Sound our trumpets!" So that cue came, and I turned to the girls and I said, "Now!"

So the two girls brought the trumpets up to their mouths, and they were so nervous that the most God-awful sounds you've ever heard came out of those horns! And as I stood there and looked at them, the horror that was registered on my face [laughing] communicated itself to them so that they just completely went to pieces. And you've never heard such a wailing and caterwauling, such agonizing sounds in your life! And it so undid them that, all through that performance, every time I'd give them the signal, I would turn my head away and just go like this [gesturing]. And the girls were completely undone. They never could recover. Needless to say, on the second and third nights, I found records and

I got an amplifying system, and we used them instead of [laughing] the live trumpets. That was a ghastly experience!

Oh, I must tell you that in connection with the lighting episode, when the lights went out, I sent word out by a messenger to the girl who was on the switchboard out in the auditorium. And I told her to be careful about turning the lights on for the second act because we were going to work on that switchboard and see if we couldn't possibly find the difficulty. And she was all ready because her cue to turn the switches was when we kicked on the footlights.

Well, we got started at first intermission, and we'd been working about five minutes, and were checking every circuit and flipping the light switches on. And all at once, I was aware that there was no longer a hum from out in the auditorium. They were just as quiet as can be. And I looked out. The house lights were out, the audience was ready for the second act. And we were nowhere ready. So we had to go on quickly and get everything all organized and go into the second act and continue to make makeshift operations of the lighting.

I'm tryin' to think of some of the other—. There were more things happened. Oh, yes, there was one time—. As one of the sages of the production, we had Meryl Deming, who was the professor of chemistry at the University for many years. And I remember he was out delivering some beautiful iambic pentameter to one of the young girls in the cast. And someone had a big pole that was standing up backstage, and that stick got loose, and it fell behind the cyclorama that we had. And as it went down, it made a swishing movement against the cyclorama, and it hit the floor with a resounding crash. And I remember, with the greatest poise in the world, Meryl Deming stopped, turned

around, and looked to see [laughing] what was happening backstage. And he had a wig on, and a beard, a false beard, with all kinds of curls. And those curls were bobbing up and down so that it just threw those members of the cast [laughing] into hysterics, watching him.

As I said, everything happened. Some of the other people who were in that particular cast were Guild Gray, who later was superintendent of schools in Clark County; my sister, Rena, played Clytemnestra, the queen, in that. Oh, we had so many—. Helen Prendiville, Doris Shaver, Martha Scrugham, Dorothy Oliver, Parnell Bailey, Carol Biddleman, Erb Austin, Patricia Wolfe.

Parnell Bailey, incidentally, is the one who was the manager of Lanz store out here. Doris Shaver, I think, is still a teacher in Sparks schools. True Gifford (that's Judge Bowen's wife), she was the little girl, Iphigenia, the character who was sacrificed in the play. We had a fellow whose name was Wendell Rupp, who played Orestes. He was a rugged individual, a bricklayer. He looked fine in his costume, and he really had a good deal of talent. It was just natural talent. And I'll never forget, when the whole show was over, he came to me and he said, "Now that the play's over, would you tell me what it was all about?" He had really done a very fine job, but he wasn't sure just what [laughing] he was doing or why. Method acting definitely hadn't come in.

In one scene my sister was playing Clytemnestra, the queen. And she goes to the three soldiers, and her plea was—the word had come down that the daughter was to be—. (Isn't it funny? I can't think of the name of that particular character.) The daughter was to be sacrificed. So she goes to the three guards who have been sent to commit the murder, make the sacrifice. And she appeals to each one of

them. And to each she says, "You would not slay my daughter?" And he's motionless. Then she goes to the next one, "You would not slay my daughter," and then she goes to the third one. And after the third one, she realizes that they are going to slay the daughter and she lets out this terrific scream.

Well, this scene had been rehearsed and rehearsed. It was sort of a bugaboo with my sister. She never knew whether she was getting it right or not. And opening night [laughing], she goes to the first guard and says, "You would not slay my daughter?" The first guard was motionless; she went to the second one, and when she gets to the third one, he closes his eyes and visibly winces because he knows the scream that is coming. And the whole audience was aware of the fact that he was closing his eyes and was waiting for it. And out came this [laughing] loud wail which just set the audience ga-ga!

It's funny how little things can happen, such as the business of drawing a sword. One of the soldiers (in fact, he was the one that designed all of the armor), he had one line when he said, "If not, my sword shall slay them." And he was to pull Out the sword in this fashion [gesture].

So in the—I think it was the queen. That's right. The queen was standing there. So he pulls out the sword, and in so doing, he catches his cape that he had hanging down, and he whips the cape up, and it goes over him, completely [laughing] covering the character [enfolding gesture] he's talking to, which also didn't add particularly to the high drama of the play.

Fortunately, most of these things happened on the tryout performance on Thursday night. By Friday, we had located our technical difficulties, as far as the lighting was concerned, and also taken care of our sound effects, and we gave a



good performance. so Claude La Belle saw a very good performance and gave us an excellent review. I think we wined and dined him sufficiently that he wasn't goin' to dare bite the hand that fed him. And I think somewhere in our records, we had that complete review of Claude La Belle's.

So impressed were we with our San Francisco publicity that we decided to do it again, and the following year [May, 1939], when we did a production of *The Women*—it was the first nonprofessional production of *The Women* in the West, and we got permission from dare Boothe Luce to do it. And we brought up a reviewer from the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He has since made a career of announcing in the San Francisco area, been on various radio stations, and he's directed plays at the Bohemian Grove, been a sometime critic on various publications. And he came up, and he was highly impressed with our production of *The Women*.

He was more impressed with Helene Reynolds, who was the widow of—a grass widow; she was out here for a divorce, and she was the wife of the aluminum Reynolds—not the tobacco Reynolds, who was a brother. (She was the sister of Thalia Massey, who was involved in a rape murder in Hawaii a few years prior to this. And this Thalia Massey's husband was a naval ensign or lieutenant. And he killed the Hawaiian houseboy who allegedly raped his wife. Clarence Darrow went to Honolulu and defended him and got him off on a year or two sentence, something of the sort. And they were Philadelphia socialites, Philadelphia or Pittsburgh, I can't think of which.) And this Helene Reynolds was out here for a divorce. Her attorney, in talking to her, found that she had been interested in amateur theater, and asked her if she'd be interested in spending some time working with the Little Theater here.

Well, she came up to the tryouts, and I recognized the publicity value of her name, and put her in the lead in the show. And she did a pretty good job.

So we planned a very ambitious production of *The Women* because we had been working—as you recall, it was written while dare Boothe Luce was in Reno for a divorce. She was divorcing Charles Brokaw, the broker. She had one scene that was set in the Riverside Hotel, and she had another scene that was set on a guest ranch here. We recognized the tremendous publicity value of doing the play, being the first to do it in the country. And so we gave it three performances and gave it all kinds of publicity. We sent pictures of our production back to Clare Boothe (I think she had married Luce by this time), and we had a very nice letter of acknowledgment.. And pictures of Helene Reynolds in the lead hit the wire service and went all over the country. We got the desired publicity. And we had three big houses. We had protests from the local ministerial association asking us not to do the production, or that we should censor part of it because it was *not* the proper moral tone. Of course, we managed to leak this to the newspapers, too, that certain influences were trying to censor our production. And that didn't hurt, believe me, at the box offices. It's interesting that we gave the same play ten years later in a revival, and everybody thought that it was sort of outdated. There was nothing shocking in it whatsoever. That's how mores and morals had changed in that length of time.

[Would I like to tell a little bit more about that episode with the Ministerial Association and the attempt to write a suitable reply? That correspondence is in the records at the University.] I'll be honest with you. I don't recall. I know that we had a letter, and it seems to me that we leaked the letter to the

newspapers deliberately to let them know that—. And then we had some letters to the editor, and we wrote a letter. Don Harvey Bell, I know, was always the one we—when we wanted something that would be rather classic [laughing], we called on him, and he drafted the letter in reply to the Ministerial Association. And I think that eventually got into the paper, too. But the net result was that we had three *very* large houses for that production. And we even had a personal letter from Clare Boothe wishing us well.

[In] *Margin for Error* [October, 1940], one of the props called for a statue, a head of Adolph Hitler. And that statue was around the Little Theater and underwent so many transformations that it's almost unbelievable. One time, it was Jim Johnson's face in the play *Another Language*. And as I said, then it was Der Feuhrer, and then it showed up as a Greek god in a Grecian play we did. And it was reworked in many plays, and I think it was only in the last four or five years that that things that piece of plaster of Paris, finally collapsed. But it had so many things added to it and taken off that it was really a very unusual prop.

We did *Two on an Island*, which was an Elmer Rice production, as I recall, in that last year at the State Building. And that was the first play in which George Stetson appeared. George was a New Englander; he had a New England accent which he has still not been able to shake. He came in and played a successful businessman in the play. This was a very episodic show. It was done in many scenes. We had stylized sets which included everything from the observation floor of the Statue of Liberty. It had a sight-seeing bus. It had a scene in a restaurant. It had a scene in an artist's studio. It just had a multiplicity of scenes, and it was a real job to stage. It had a big cast. We gave it, as I recall—yes, in December

[1940], and we hit a period of the flu. And our rehearsals were handicapped by all of these people getting sick. I was always having to play around to fill a vacancy in the cast.

In the final week, one of the leading characters was taken ill. There was nobody who could play the role, nobody available who was familiar with it, so I had to step in in his part. When it came to the final dress rehearsal, I was down with the flu. And it was just a question of who was feeling worse and who could be in the final performances. The young fellow that I replaced had lost his interest, and he wasn't about to get up out of bed to be in the play. So I was stuck.

And we had such a succession of incidents happen during that production that it was almost unbelievable. One of the characters in it, a young society matron, was played by Edna Bulaski, who was one of the local characters. She was the wife of the owner of the El Cortez Hotel. And she had a beautiful, beautiful wardrobe, which she loved to drag out for plays. Among other things, she had a beautiful white fox coat. And the coat was worn in one of the restaurant scenes. I had to play this scene opposite her. And there was a great deal of buildup for her entrance. After she came in, I was to take her coat off and turn and hang it up on the hanger with some suitable comments about how beautiful it was, and so on.

She came in, I took the coat off and turned around to hang it up, and there was a bare wall. There wasn't a hanger anywhere in sight. So I just had to fake the thing, and I just held it up for a few seconds and let it drop on the floor. And she looked at this white [laughing] fur coat on the floor. It was fortunately behind the counter, you see, so that you couldn't see where it had landed.

And then we had a series of flubs. That was the scene in which Mildred Fisher was

the prop girl. And she was supposed to bring on—. In one scene, the ingenue is very broke, and all she can afford is corn flakes. And she comes into this little hamburger stand and orders corn flakes. This was played by Patsy Prescott Goldwater (she was Patsy Prescott at the time). I think she was a senior in high school. And she came on with this great to-do, went through this business about all she could afford to order was the regular corn flakes.

Mildred is offstage, and she goes to get the corn flakes, and found that they had been spilled and had been put in the garbage and had been hauled off. So there're no corn flakes! And this happened just a few minutes before the requirement came up. So she gets paper towels and tears them up into little bits and puts them in this bowl and sends them on with [laughing] whipped cream. Patsy looked at those and went through, halfheartedly, the business of trying to pretend that she was eating corn flakes.

I had a similar situation just a few minutes later when I came in. I was supposed to be a play director, I think, something connected with the theater. And I supposedly came to this place for a bowl of chili, for which they were famous. So the bowl of chili came out. I had all the necessary lines. The bowl of chili came out and was put in front of me, and I started to eat it, and all I had were two knives. [Laughing] There wasn't a spoon or a fork anywhere in sight. And if you think that was something, try to eat the beans with a knife, and still act poised!

That particular show had just about everything that you can think of happen to it. When Patsy came out the first scene, she was modeling, and she was supposed to model in a bathing suit in this artist's—. That's it, I was an artist in it. I was the artist who was supposed to be painting her, except that I was shorter than she was, and the casting

was slightly unfortunate. But she came out in this scene, and none of us had checked to see what she was going to wear—the bathing suit. She had on a yellow bathing suit! And the light that we had on it—she came on stage, and I think that our audiences felt that they were seeing their first nude performance on a Reno stage. There was a gasp when she came out. And then finally, the word filtered back from the people in the front rows that it was all right, Patsy did have a bathing suit, and it just happened to be an unfortunate yellow color, and the lights had just made it look as if she had absolutely nothing on.

*George Washington Slept Here* was the final production in the regular season in [May] 1941. We always tried to end the season with the most recent play available, and always a comedy, because that play helped us in the sale of season tickets for the following season. *George Washington Slept Here* was a George Kaufman show, and it was a satire on the Eastern fetish over the early taverns and homes which had Colonial associations. This particular play was built around a home that was a complete wreck, and this gullible couple buys it at the insistence of the realtors that this was a home where George Washington had once slept.

And in the play, the first scene shows this terrible, run-down house. In the next act, the house has been completely redecorated and restored and beautifully furnished. And in the last act, the couple discovers that they're losing the house through some fluke. And so rather than give it to somebody else, the wife decides that she will return the house to the new owners in the condition in which she got it. So she proceeds to wreck the place, throwing garbage and everything around, and just tearing the place apart.

So you can see that it did have funny lines, but it had a real technical problem. And we

had our hands full on this small State Building stage trying to put that on. Let's see, the principal characters were Loring Williams, who was the old rustic character, and Wallace McPhail, and there was a woman by the name of Dorothea Best. Those two played the husband and wife. And, oh, Dorman Patten, I forgot he was in it, and Ray Frohlich, and Dick Hillman.

We built the set so that we could have wallpaper that could be peeled off, canvas-type wallpaper. We put that on over the painted set between acts. And then in the last act, when they threw garbage at it, they threw it on the wallpapered flats, and then we had to wash them down afterwards so that we could roll the lengths up and put it away for the next performance.

I was very happy that that production only played three nights because it was such a job! And we had business of trying to light a fire in the fireplace, and when they'd look up the flue, the soot comes rolling out. It just had *everything* under the sun! It was not worth the work involved in working all those gimmicks.

That was our final play of that season in the State Building. That's when we announced that we had acquired Dania Hall and that we hoped to rehabilitate it and open our new season the following fall if we were able to raise enough money. So we advertised the benefit performance of "The Male Animal" and got that play together in three weeks.

It was along about the late '30's that we were seriously talking about getting a theater building that was adequate. One of the steps in that direction had been the remodeling that we had succeeded in getting in the State Building, on the stage, which made it a little more usable for our purposes. Then we spotted the California Building out in Idlewild Park, which was the property of

the city of Reno from the Transcontinental Highway Exposition back in 1927. We had an architect, Ed Parsons, who was a friend of the theater group, who worked out plans for conversion of the building into a theater. And we even scrounged around and found seats that could be utilized. The problem was that we just couldn't raise enough money to carry out the remodeling. The building had been built with posts, two rows of posts down the center, and it was very impractical for our usage. And when it was finally remodeled in the late '50's, I believe it was necessary for them to practically put in a truss system in the roof in order to eliminate the posts and make it suitable for square dancing, for instance.

But it was around this time that we were definitely starting agitation in the community for a proper theater building. There was nothing outside of the State Building that was suitable. We had used the school facilities; they were not satisfactory. We wanted something with which we could identify. We used our studio up on West Street as sort of a nucleus. We had parties there. We had people coming. We had talks.

The opportunity came in 1940 to possibly get a place of our own when we were approached by property owners in the Seventh and Sierra Street area to see if we would be interested in buying the old Dania Hall and using it as a theater. Here, we found that the fruits of our long campaign to agitate for a theater were beginning to be realized. These people knew we were in existence and they thought maybe there was a possibility that we could take over the place.

The building had been sold to a Negro church. And at that time, we know what the prejudices were in all communities, Reno no less than any of the others. And the property owners of that area did not want a church there in place of Dania Hall.

The building had been built in the mid-'20's. It was a solid brick building. It had a meeting hall on the main floor which was reached by a flight of steps. And then, downstairs, there was a banquet room and storage facilities for lodge paraphernalia. It was a very simple building. It was inadequately heated; it had a wood stove on the main floor and one downstairs, and an old stove out in the kitchen.

Some of the property owners—I think Mrs. Morrison—led the way and made it possible for us to acquire the building, and she put up the money (which, as I recall, was \$11,000) to buy the building in its condition. [Laughing] It had a roof that leaked like a sieve, and we knew that that was one of the first things that would have to be corrected.

We made the arrangements for the purchase early in the spring of 1941, I believe. So we figured that we would have to do something to raise money, so we gave an extra production at the end of our regular season. In June, we gave a production of *The Male Animal* [May, 1941]. It was by Thurber and had to do with college life. We used all of our key people. In fact, we used many of the founding members of the Little Theater in leading roles. And we gave it and advertised it as strictly a money raising production in order to finance repairs in the remodeling of the theater building.

We raised, I believe, between \$1,500 and \$2,000 on that production, and then we started a drive for donations, and we organized a life membership group. I think, to begin with, the cost was fifty dollars. It was either fifty or a hundred dollars; I can't remember. A hundred dollars—yes, I guess that was it. A hundred dollars guaranteed you two seats for a lifetime. It could be passed to the surviving spouse, but it ended there with the death of the survivor. It was a good

business deal for some people. And we still have some of our original life members.

We raised quite a bit of money in that regard, in that way, and we started, right in June, then, of the summer of 1941, to do most of the remodeling ourselves. We completely gutted the inside of the building. I worked all day and was assisted by various volunteers who would devote a few hours each day to come up and tear down some plaster and tear down some more partitions. And we tore out the little lecture platform, which was at one end of the stage, and then put in a small stage that was about fifteen feet deep, as I recall. We cut a trap door into the basement and had sort of a stepladder so that you could get onto the stage or leave it. Space was something of a premium. We had a low ceiling to contend with, but we did come up with a fairly creditable looking stage.

Work went on all summer long. We got the seats that had been stored out at the California Building and hauled them to our new location at Seventh and Sierra. We had teams whose job was just to reupholster those old seats. And we sent back East and got leatherette covering for the seats and the backs. Our members took all the old chairs apart, reassembled them, and reupholstered them, and then painted them all.

We had another crew that scrounged furniture and reupholstered it. We had a number of couches and chairs that were recovered by volunteers. We had volunteers who did all the painting and carpeting, which we begged from various sources. And we had, really, quite a fairly presentable theater when we got through, although we had the handicap of a flat floor. We owe a note of thanks to the school board, the Reno school board, because they had a number of chairs available; They were in gangs of four, four seats in a section. They were wooden chairs



that had been discarded, and the school authorities turned them over to us, so in order to make them a little more comfortable, we had a crew that made cushions that we tied on the seats and the backs of those chairs. So we did make it fairly comfortable.

And we were lucky to be able to get a furnace. At that time, during that summer, there was a strike in all the furnace factories. But we were able to locate one furnace that was complete; it was in Minnesota. It was ready for shipment, and we had it shipped. We ordered early in the summer, and it must've taken two months or so to reach Reno. We had a heating engineer who volunteered to lay out a heating plan for us, and he supervised the installation of the furnace and put in the duct work so we had adequate heat in the building. And we raised enough money to have a professional job done of a new roof. I made some signs; we hung billboards that were hung out in front. Those same signs have since been moved, and they stand up, signs that are in the front of the building. We opened in October of 1941. Our first production was *The Man Who Came to Dinner*.

But there had been other changes at that time besides the acquisition of a building of our own. I received a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship to the Pasadena Community Playhouse. I was one of five who had an opportunity to pick a theater either in a community or in a university in which they could serve for a year and pick up the techniques that were employed in that particular group, and I chose the Pasadena Playhouse. It came not at the very best of times, because I would have liked to be here for the opening of the theater that we had talked about for six years, but I knew that I had to take advantage of that opportunity, and I came back, then, for the opening production.

In order to fill out the directing chores for the year, I got Rankin Mansfield to come out from New York. Rankin was a professional actor who had one hit on Broadway, and that was *One Sunday Afternoon*, with Lloyd Nolan. He made the mistake of figuring that since he'd had this one hit, that everybody was going to come to him, and he would make his mark as an actor. Unfortunately, it didn't work that way, and he never did have another professional acting assignment because he waited too long and his name had dropped out, and he wasn't known any longer. So he used to spend his summers directing a summer stock company at Mt. Gretna, Pennsylvania.

And through a chain of one of these circumstances, I had—. As I told you, my friend of high school days had been Dan Senseney. He had moved East to try his hand at writing in New York City, and he had met friends that I had met in Los Angeles who had moved to New York City to try their luck at acting. And through this chain of circumstances, they met Rankin Mansfield. And I met him when I went back in the summer of 1937, when I took a cruise in the Mediterranean, used up all of my savings thereby. I met Rankin Mansfield and went down and saw one of his productions at Mt. Gretna. And I kept sort of occasional touch with him, so that when I was looking for a director, I wrote to him and found out that he had nothing to do in the wintertime after he had finished his summer stint at Gretna, because he was there for a number of years. So he jumped at the opportunity to come out to Reno. He came out and took over as director and chief designer and head of construction, and so on. And it was to be for a one-year period until I came back from the Pasadena Playhouse.

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## WARTIME INTERIM, 1941-1945

As it happened, of course, the war broke out in December of '41, and I gave up all thoughts of continuing in the theater. I was at the Pasadena Playhouse. I was going to resign my scholarship there immediately, but I was unable to enlist in any of the services I wanted because of my eyes. So I stayed there until March, and then I decided that I would come back to Reno and see if I could possibly get—if necessary, I'd have to get into the Army. I couldn't get into the Navy, or the Marines, or anything else.

So I came. I resigned from the Playhouse, came back to Reno, was not accepted when I tried to enlist in the Army. Finally, I was drafted in—I think it was May—April or May of '42, went back to Fort Douglas and was rejected and told to come back. I would probably be called again when they lowered the [laughing] eyesight requirements enough for me to get in limited service.

So I came back, and I was not very active in the theater at this time 'cause I had other things on my mind. Fortunately, we had Rankin Mansfield, who was taking over as

the director, and he was too old to be eligible for the draft. So that solved that problem for the Reno Little Theater.

I spent six weeks learning to be a club director for the USO down in Las Vegas, then came back and opened the USO here in Reno, which at that time was in the basement of the old Elks building across the street from here. I had that running pretty well by the end of the summer, when I received notice from Uncle Sam to report in September, again, for a physical in Salt Lake.

And this time I was accepted, so I went, then, into the Army as a private, and I was sent to Helena, Montana, where I was with the headquarters of the—let's see, Fort William Henry Harrison. And this was a training center for a group known as the First Special Service Force, a very hush-hush activity, which we later learned was intended to be used in the recapture of Norway. And the men there were sent there to be trained in Winter warfare, in parachute jumping, and in the development of the "weasel," which since has developed into skimobiles and things.



I was not under the First Special Service Force. As I say, I was with the headquarters group. I went in in personnel, in the personnel office (this was when my college [laughing] degree stood me in such great stead). It was a very, very primitive camp, I must tell, you. And that was a miserable, cold, bitter cold winter. I know the thermometer went down to thirty-nine below, and that was the coldest I'd ever experienced.

It was a very enjoyable period because I had been planning to be married in September. In fact, we had set a wedding date, which was upset by Uncle Sam. So Mary and I had planned to be married in December, and we were. She came up to Helena, and we were married on the twenty-third of December in the Cathedral of St. Helena, with none of our Reno friends or relatives present. And in honor of the occasion, my superior officer promoted me to corporal. He said, "I don't think you should be married as a private." He said, "It wouldn't look good in the society item [laughing]. So," he said, "I'm going to make you a corporal right as of now." So Corporal Semenza was married to Mary Elcano.

I was in the Army almost four years. I was going to go into special services where I could work in what was the equivalent of the USO in the military. I managed to get an appointment to the special service school in Fargo, North Dakota, and just as I was getting ready to leave, they closed the school 'cause they had enough people trained for that particular job. So then I transferred. Since I was in limited service, and there were a limited number of schools that were available for my particular classification, I had a choice of quartermaster or medical administration. I chose medical administration and I was sent to Camp Barclay at Abilene, Texas, in July of 1942. I was in the first of the four months' training class. I was not a "ninety-

day wonder"; I was a 120-day wonder. And I suffered through four months in that terribly hot weather in Abilene, and thereby acquired a permanent aversion for the panhandle of Texas [laughing].

I graduated from OCS as a second lieutenant in November. I was sent to an officers' pool in Spokane, Washington. See, I managed to go north in the winter and south in the summer. And in Spokane, I was there about four months. In April of '43, I was sent to Maryland, Aberdeen Proving Ground. I was assistant adjutant in a hospital back there, stayed there for a number of months.

Our first child, John, was born in Baltimore in December of '44, on the eighteenth, as a matter of fact, the week before Christmas. I got him home and back to our apartment in Baltimore and got him and his mother settled there, and then I left for Fort Scott in Illinois in January. I arrived there on January 1 of '45. A few days later, I went overseas with the 227th General Hospital. We landed in Le Havre, in France (it was a miserable winter), and we eventually wound up outside of Reims in the little settlement of Mourmelon, which was the site of sort of a French West Point. It was the home base of the 101st airborne division. They weren't there because they were surrounded at Bastogne, up in Germany. In Mourmelon we set up the first hospital center.

The 227th General Hospital was one of the five hospitals which made up the hospital center. And our particular specialty was psychiatry; we got the mental patients. I was with the group a short length of time and became the adjutant, and I served the rest of my time in the service as adjutant of the 227<sup>th</sup> General Hospital until peace came.

Then we went through a retraining and a general reshuffling, and went down to Marseilles, and were prepared to go to the Pacific theater when the war ended. I stayed

in Marseilles, still with the 227<sup>th</sup> General Hospital, which, by that time, had taken over a French hospital in Marseilles and was acting as the American Army hospital for all of the troops that were debarking from France. I stayed with that hospital until January 1, 1946, when I managed to wangle myself into a quota of returning officers, and I came back, as I say, sailed January 1, 1946, and then came home and was discharged. Well, I had a terminal leave which began the end of January and ended in March of '46.

I will now go back a little bit and tell how the Theater was faring. These were very fine years for the Little Theater. We had an Army base nearby, which was the Reno Army Air Base, and later became Stead. And there were all of these men out there, many of them with dependents. They came in to the theater. Many of them worked actively. Some of 'em even had time to take part in plays. We gave special performances for them. It was one of the chief attractions available. Of course, the gas rationing made it hard for people to leave the area, so they had to look for all of the local entertainment that could be provided. And as I say, these were great years for the Theater.

They played eight or nine, sometimes ten performances at each show, and usually always to packed houses. They made enough money to pay off the indebtedness and raised enough money to do some major remodeling, despite the wartime restrictions. That's when the floor of the auditorium was raised and the downstairs lobby area was enlarged, and, oh, there were a number of improvements that were put into the theater. We had a restroom put in the back, downstairs, for the use of the actors. And in general, it, as I say, was a time of great progress.

(The seasons I was gone began with *The Man Who Came to Dinner*. That was a very successful opening for our building. I think

I've mentioned earlier the amount of work that was involved in getting the place ready, and we worked right up to opening night, laying the secondhand carpet down the aisles, and getting the seats in, and last-minute painting. And, of course, all the time, there was the business of getting the stage ready. We also had a play in rehearsal. Since I was at the Pasadena Playhouse, I was not in on the last five weeks in that rehearsal period, and I came back for opening night. But I had spent all summer working on the manual side of getting the building ready.

That was a very successful season, and I think that they played one week for each production. We had a very elaborate program for that first year. That was the large one with the line drawing of the new building on the cover. I think George Stetson was responsible for gathering all of the ads in that program that season.

The second production was *Ladies in Retirement*, which featured Leona Fowler, Evelyn Brussard, my wife, Mary, and Blythe Bulmer, my sister Grace, Willard Weller, and Martadel Cooper, who was Dorothy Cooper's sister, the daughter of the former mayor.

The third production of that season [February, 1942] was *The Philadelphia Story*, which was subsequently revived last season. And that had in it the local names: Cebe Loomis played the lead, Edgar Olsen (who is still around Reno), Graham Gorman (in the First National Bank), Wallace McPhail, Muriel Holland, and Glen Judd, Stuart Williams, and Fred Cunningham.

Fred Cunningham's wife, Hazel, became interested in the theater, and later served in many capacities on the executive board (she was secretary of the Little Theater for many years), particularly during these war years.

Then in the spring, they did *Old Acquaintance*, and *Mr. and Mrs. North*, which

was a mystery comedy, and Dick Mansfield also played a role in that, as well as directed. In the cast was Carl Shelly, Helen Drake again, Patsy Prescott, George Stetson, Graham Gorman.

Then as a conclusion for that season, they did a minstrel show and an old-time melodrama. This was an extra production to raise money for the building fund. And in the cast were some of the University faculty. The University football coach was in it, and Stuart Williams was the emcee. And there were a lot of prominent men in the community who were eager and volunteered to be in a minstrel show. There hadn't been one in the area for years and years, and they were quite enchanted with the idea of reviving one.

[That wouldn't be acceptable now at all.] No, I don't think you could possibly get over with it. Just as, over the years, we have found that a revival of the old-time melodrama is very successful, and one we would stay away from is *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. We couldn't possibly do it because the attitudes have changed completely. I understand that there have been communities that have tried to revive *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and they've had to give it up because it has so many protests. I guess it's understandable, although I think we'll probably get to a period where you look back on it and discover that it was a museum piece, actually, and it was not really propaganda.

Let's see. *My Sister Eileen* was one of the early successes during the war years. *Arsenic and Old Lace*, which was later revived right after I returned in the '50's, we did it. That had in the cast, in addition to Leona Fowler and Loring Williams, Peter Echeverria, who subsequently became prominent locally as an attorney; Carl Shelly; Genevra Kimpton, who played one of the old ladies (she still lives here locally; her son, I think, is on the police force).

*Pursuit of Happiness* was another comedy given in the season of '42-'43. Pretty much the same familiar names pop up, including the name of Bill Miller in that play. He played one of the Puritans.

*Here Comes Mr. Jordan* was in that year, a highly successful comedy. Jack Cunningham's name appears in the cast.

It was in the season of 1942 and '43 that the Sunday Afternoons at Three were hatched. These were years when the community was eager for any kind of entertainment. The theater was going full blast, and they tried to meet a demand by putting on these Sunday afternoons of play readings and serve tea after the program.

In these years, these wartime years, they had a regular season of five plays, and then the sixth play was always the benefit play, for the sake of the building fund, to try to pay off the loan.

Let's see, some of the other plays—*My Dear Children*, which was a play made famous by John Barrymore, in which he usually was inebriated every performance and ad-libbed his lines, it was more of a museum piece than anything else—curiosity I should say.

*Cuckoos on the Hearth* was a combination of mystery and comedy. Other plays—*Spring Again*, *The Damask Cheek*, and *Kiss and Tell*. *Kiss and Tell* was one of the most successful plays of the war years. It had a very, very long run, and in the lead was Tosca Masini Means, one of the first performances that she did in the theater, and she was very active for a number of years after that. Let's see. Others who were in that production [included] Bruce Shelly. The building fund play that year was *Rebecca*, which featured Dr. N. B. Joseph, and I think Lucile Snider Parks was in that, also.

Let's see. We did *Junior Miss* in the season of '44 and '45; and *Tomorrow the World*, which was a story based on the Nazis; *Over*

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*Twenty-One; Claudia; Three's a Family.* And the building fund play that year was *Suspect*, which featured Lucile Snider Parks. That was the play in which she felt certainly she would be tapped by Hollywood, but no one tapped her. She went on.



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## RETURN TO RENO: GOOD YEARS IN THE LITTLE THEATER, 1946-1953

My dramatic activities, of course, during the war years were primarily that of the spectator. I managed to see a few plays in some of the cities where I was located. I was able to get a season of opera at Marseilles in the fall of 1945, and that was an experience, going in. People went to the opera every week just the way we would go to the movies. And it was really quite an interesting experience. I enjoyed that thoroughly.

The first six years of the theater, I devoted almost exclusively a hundred percent of my time to theater activities. During this time, I was able to watch every phase of theater because I was doing most of it myself. I had a few volunteers, but there aren't too many people who were available in the daytime to help in building sets and so on, so I had to do most of it myself with the help of some. There were high school students who used to come down after school and help out, and people like Don Harvey Bell would get some of his friends in school to devote some time. And it was hard because directing had to be done at night, and sets had to be built at night. So

usually, I would have to get a crew to volunteer to come in on Saturdays and Sundays, which meant that I was going all weekend—every night during the week, and the weekends as well. So I didn't have too much free time except in the summer months.

After the war, when I came back to the theater in 1946, I then had to divide my time. I was teaching at the University for a period of five years, so I had to budget time a little more carefully there so that I was splitting my interests. The work on the campus was of interest to me, and after the first year or so, the preparation was not as strenuous as it had been. And I was lucky enough to be able to be teaching different subjects each year, which kept it from being too routine. It was a great opportunity for me to establish contacts on the campus with people who wanted to work in theater and who had something to offer to the theater. It was a very, very fine period, and that's where I met so many of the faculty and students who are still personal friends.

I spent the remainder of the spring of 1945 teaching at the University. I got back in

time to be hired in the English department, and I had four sections of freshman English, which I taught. And then I had two sessions, I believe, in summer session that summer, and then I went back to directing the Little Theater in the fall of '46.

I had previously had some experience on the University faculty, because in '39, I was hired to take Bob Griffin's place while he completed his residence requirement for his Ph.D. at USC. And then the following year, I filled in for Bill Miller. So I had had two years teaching.

I enjoyed the experience, and I guess, maybe, even though I had disliked teaching when I'd first graduated, somehow or other, things seemed to contrive to push me back into the teaching game. I had been pushed back into the educational deal in the CCC camp out in Hawthorne. When I was first starting the Little Theater, I directed one year at the University. It was when I was filling in for Bill Miller. That was kind of a strenuous year because I had to do both Little Theater and the University at the same time. And both of them usually had to be rehearsed at night, although I did manage to get some of the University rehearsals in in late afternoon, and they ran into early evening. And then I set the rehearsals for later at the theater itself.

The experience was entirely different from directing the community people. For one thing, the control at that time was a little bit better because many of these students were participating for credit. And in addition to directing, I had a class in play production in which we were teaching acting, directing, and the various technical phases of theater. I enjoyed this. This was the first opportunity in which I could bring to bear some of the training that I had gotten when I was getting my master's at USC. I liked the classroom experience very much and enjoyed the people

I was working with, many of whom are still personal friends. I met them through class associations or in campus activities.

I'm not too familiar with the plays we did. I know we did one comedy, which was a Henry Aldrich comedy that featured Grant Sawyer in the role of the boy. The play was part of a series on radio (this is by way of a coincidence); it was part of a series that was produced by Edwin Duerr, who was my director at the University in the four years that I was going there. Then, the following spring, we did a production of *Ah, Wilderness*, O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness*, and Grant Sawyer played the father in this play. He played the son in the first semester, and he played the character part of a father the second semester. As I remember, Joe McDonald, Jr. was in that particular cast. I can't remember too many of the other people. We did a production of *Craig's Wife*, which was a drama; I remember Blythe Bulmer's niece [Evelyn Bulmer] played the lead in that. And there was one other play that we did at that time. It was a costume play, as I recall, a Greek thing. But I can't think of what it was. And we also did a *Wolves' Frolic*. That *Wolves' Frolic* was almost the undoing of me. I tried to do something a little different from the usual pattern, which was a mistake, had four sets, all of which had to be junked during the dress rehearsals because the various members of the orchestra couldn't hear each other.

And at that time, the *Wolves' Frolic* followed more or less a set pattern. It featured an orchestra, which was a combination of volunteer and union talent, and it featured a dancing chorus, skits put on by the various fraternities and sororities, as well as individual acts, bringing out the talent of students.

It seems to me now that there was more individual talent available for these *Wolves' Frolics* than there is now. I mean there was



always a two-piano team, and there were always singing groups, various people who were gifted in different musical instruments. There was lots of dancing talent available. And the Wolves' Frolic really was an event.

Now, interests seem to have changed., and I think this is a reflection of this decline of interest on the part of people to participate in theater. They've become passive. They want to see things. I don't know what it is. I can attribute this to TV, but I think it is largely the fact that people can see things in their home with a twist of the button, and it isn't necessary to change clothes, get into the car, and go downtown, or drive across town to see something. And if you don't like it, you can turn it off and switch to something else. And I don't think that the students now are as interested in developing, creating something of their own. At least if they are, they are very much in the minority, because the Wolves' Frolic is a typical example of something that is dying. But they don't recognize it, and they try to keep it going for the sake of tradition. And it just won't work because there isn't enough talent that is being developed among the young people.

The future of the community theater is problematical. hope that it's the lowest point, and that from now on, it'll be moving up. But when I see what's happened with a theater as old and as established as the Pasadena Playhouse, I feel that the road is pretty rough. It's going to have to be supported in some way to remove the pressure for the box office success. Somehow or other, it's got to be kept going, even when the audiences have dwindled, until such time as we have another generation coming along that *is* interested in theater, that is stimulated by better theater than is being written, for instance. I think when we get better scripts, then there will be a renewed interest. Right now, theater is

supported largely by a group of people who were introduced to theater over thirty years ago. In the Broadway theaters, you don't see the younger people that you should be seeing. somehow or other, they aren't challenged. If you see them, you'll see them in stuff that is far out in the theater of the ridiculous or the absurd or the black comedy, or something of the sort.

Anyway, the experience that I had that year of directing in college was an eye-opening one, and I might say that I felt at that time, after that one year, that I hadn't made a mistake in deciding to go into community theater, rather than in a college theater. I had had several opportunities to go into the college area, and I had chosen to stick with the community theater, and I'm happy that I did. But the experience was a good one, through contacts and opportunity to compare and contrast the method of handling and approaching the play production on the college level and on the community theater level. The five years that I was teaching part-time on campus, in '46 to '51, I was almost exclusively in the field of English and interpretation and public speaking.

I finally worked up to the handsome salary of a thousand dollars a year with the Little Theater. The first year, I worked part time keeping books, I think I mentioned before, in a service station, and managed to eke out an existence, and I got a couple of hundred dollars or so out of the theater. Then the second year I was put on a salary of a thousand dollars a year. And I stayed there until I left in '41. I was able to augment it, of course, in those two years when I was filling in at the University. But as I recall, the salaries were not very, very generous, and that they were paying full-time instructors up there much less than someone who was just filling in.

But it was a good experience because I met a number of college people, both on the faculty level and among the student body, many of whom came into the Little Theater. And it made a very nice relationship which has lasted to this day.

When I went back in '46 and taught only freshman English, I became acquainted with members of the English faculty, and that's where I met Bob Gorrell and enticed him to come into the theater. And he has been a valiant, faithful worker ever since. He manages to appear usually at least once a year.

1946—that season was a very good one in that we reaped the benefits of the end of the war. Money suddenly was very plentiful, but goods and materials and ways to spend money were limited. And as a result, people spent money on entertainment. I think we had the best box office year that season of '46 and '47. I know for the production of *Dear Ruth* [November, 1946], which was the story of a wartime serviceman who returned, for eight performances, we had a sellout every night. And as I say, that was a very good season. We made a lot of money, and we were beginning to save toward improvements, further improvements, in our building.

I opened that first season of 1946 with the production of *State of the Union* [October, 1946]. *State of the Union* was a comedy about politics, written by Lindsay and Crouse, had to do with the election of a president. It called for three sets, and I knew it was going to tax the facilities of our theater building because we had a stage that was so inadequate. As I had mentioned, we had a trap door on one side, on the north side of the stage. And in order to get on stage, you had to come up this ladder, get through the trap door, and lower the trap door so you'd have some place to stand when you were offstage, and then go on stage. A number of accidents occurred

on those steps, including having the trap door fall on people's heads a little too soon [laughing] and almost knocking them out. And we had some very amusing experiences, too. Sometimes people had difficulty getting through this little opening when they were costumed in an elaborate costume.

I knew we were going to have problems, because it was impossible there to get from one side of the stage to the other during an act because we usually put our sets right back to the rear wall. So I determined that for *State of the Union* I was going to rig up some system whereby we could get out on the south side of the building. There was a window there, so I took the window out and put in a wooden door. I got all of the flights of steps and platforms that we had available and stacked them up and made a very jerrybuilt escape out of this particular window, and then arranged to have all of the furniture for succeeding acts at ground level, and then we would lift them up between the acts, up these crazy stairs. The only trouble was that just the day before we opened, I got a call from the fire department saying we would have to remove that fire menace immediately or they would close the theater. I had to explain to them that this was not an exit for our audiences, but it was only for the use of the stage crew, and that we would be unable to do the play unless we had the opportunity to go down and take all the furniture up for set changes. The furniture was all brand new (it was borrowed from a local furniture store), and we had to be very careful with it. They finally agreed to let us go ahead.

And naturally, of course, opening night, it rained here. We don't have too much rain [laughing] in October, or late September, but we did on that occasion, which meant getting tarps from wherever we could scrounge them to cover up all this brand new furniture that

we had. But the production came off, and it was very successful. It featured Cebe Loomis in the leading role and Glen Judd as the presidential candidate.

*Dear Ruth* [November, 1946] was a comedy based on wartime service. We had as our leading character a young University student. His name was Roger Brander. This was the first production that Roger appeared in for us. He was a big, tall, blond boy, six feet six in height, and he was a natural actor and a natural comedian. He made many appearances in subsequent productions. After leaving Reno for a number of years (he had a family by this time, three boys, I think), he eventually returned to Reno and then became active again in the Little Theater, and became associated with several radio stations. In fact, he was going to become a part owner in a small radio station; it was located in Sparks. He was the sole Reno resident who was killed in the crash of the Pacific Airlines plane that went down in the Bay area when a crazed passenger shot the pilot and the copilot. It was really a tremendous loss not only personally to his family, but to the community, because he had a great personality and a lot of talent.

*Dear Ruth* also was a play in which we had a very amusing incident which took place on the last performance, which was a Sunday night. The play had a gimmick in which each character who came down from upstairs to breakfast commented on the kooky hat that the young ingenue had on. It was the young girl. She had to wear a strange kind of beret. And no less than four people commented on it as their introductory remark when they came into the play. On that night (it was after we had had an afternoon performance and we'd had supper in the basement of the theater, and everybody was relaxed, almost too relaxed), she went on stage and forgot to put the hat on. So she had nothing on her head. And it was

very interesting. The first actor commented on it and went by, the audience didn't pay much attention. They thought she must've had a hat on because that was the comment. Well, on the second player's entrance and comment, we heard a slight murmur. And then, the third time, you could very definitely hear, "Do you see a hat on her head? I don't see anything, do you?" And the fourth time it was done, there was a roar of protest among everybody (laughing), that they did not see any [laughing] hat on her head. It was the sort of slip that you just couldn't possibly cover in any way, and you just had to let it go, which was what we did, in that case. But it had everybody broken up backstage.

These years in the late '40's were very productive ones. Financially, the theater did very well, and we were raising money at that time to enlarge the theater and try to provide the proper facilities for playmaking. One of the steps I took to improve our technical conditions was to tear out the ceiling of the old stage and manage to get a little more height by going up into the rafters of the building. The whole thing was strictly illegal and outside of the building code, but it was a necessity. In order to have additional working space, we, during this period, bought ten feet of land from the adjoining lot, and we used that space in order to put up rather a permanent stairway that was an improvement over the first jerry-built affair. Then we used that for exits and for getting onto the stage. It was a regular stage door, which made it possible for us to do productions where you could come down the stairs and go around the building and come in on the other side without being completely out of breath.

We also bought a quonset hut, which we stored on the back end of our lot, and managed to move all of our props and scenery and much of the costume materials out into

the hut, to get them out of the basement. We used the basement, then, We no longer built our sets down there, but we used it for a meeting place. We put in a wardrobe room, and I managed to scrounge some wardrobe cabinets from a women's dress shop that was going out of business. We put those things in down there, and really developed the wardrobe from that point on.

Incidentally, Rankin Mansfield, or "Dick," as he was known here, was a very capable, a very competent scene designer, and also could sew. He made many costumes (which were a part of our wardrobe) for the costume plays that he gave during his four years, and never did anyone work any harder to keep the theater going than he did during those war years. He not only directed, but he often acted leads, and built the scenery (in most cases, single-handed), and also helped the wardrobe.

I think it was in the war years that they started the idea of a Sunday Afternoon at Three, because, as I say, entertainment was hard to come by during the war years. And the governing group in the theater decided they would try out a program of play readings on Sunday afternoons. They would invite people. I think they had a silver donation, or something of the sort. A current play would be reviewed, and then refreshments would be served afterwards. The afternoons were very, very successful for a number of years. And they added to the development of permanent audience, people who looked to the Reno Little Theater for a theater in the community. I think these were started during—yes, they were started during Dick's regime.

There is a funny story told of one of the Sunday Afternoons at Three. At this time, George Stetson had become the chairman of the board of the Little Theater. He had come to the theater in 1940, appeared first in a play called *Two on an Island* by [Elmer]

Rice. And he became hooked on theater, and he was one of the people who kept the theater afloat during the war years. He was the business manager, he gathered ads, and kept the program going, and so on. It was through him, of course, that I developed a very close personal friendship and eventually wound up where I am right now.

On this particular Sunday Afternoon at Three, George introduced the person who was reading a play, giving a review of the play. We had on the stage three holes that were cut across the front of the stage, for footlights. We had some old trough footlights that we had scrounged up to put in these holes. But usually, they weren't in there. They could be taken out. And George made an introduction of the speaker and took a step backwards and wound up [laughing]—he disappeared from sight. He had dropped down [laughing] into the footlight space. And the audience, those who were in the back, wondered what had happened to him. Those up in front saw just this much of him, from the chest up [laughing, gesturing to show head and shoulders], above the stage floor. It was a highlight of the Sunday Afternoons at Three, and the story is still told by those who—.

The first time that I acted in a play was back in the second or third season. I think it was when we did—it was a Kaufman and Hart—oh, *First Lady* (October, 1937). And there was an opening scene where there're many diplomats and generals and military figures running around at a reception. But unfortunately, the young man who was to play the general didn't show up for our first performance. We had no uniform, nothing. He had kept that at home. We never did see him. And so I had to call the University and see if I could get a uniform from the military department (this was that night), and I went on as the general, went on cold. Fortunately,

I didn't have too many lines, but I was able to get through. I didn't really like to act in plays because there just wasn't time to build the scenery and direct the plays, work on publicity, and all that. There just wasn't time enough to really devote to learning lines or anything. But that was my introduction to acting.

I did take a part in (a play as) a principal. I took a lead in *The Male Animal*, primarily because we were billing it as the—we had the cast of some of the original starters of the Little Theater. And I enjoyed that role very much. Then I played—in the late '40's, we did *Joan of Lorraine* [May, 1947], and that was a play within a play. One of the principal characters was the director, and it was the easiest thing in the world to play the director. I thought it was the easiest thing in the world, except that I had so many other things to think about, including a Joan who was very pregnant and was having difficulty getting through performances. We hit one of the hottest weeks in May with *Joan of Lorraine*, and the people actually stayed away because of the intense heat. I worried because Joan had on heavy armor, and it was really a physical chore. And she lost her voice. The second Sunday of each run, we'd have a matinee and a night performance. We had to cancel this matinee because Joan had bad laryngitis and would only be able to do one performance. So we got through that one, despite the heat. Incidentally, that was Cebe Loomis who played Joan.

During those '40's, I might mention the fact that we were playing eight performances. We were opening on a Sunday afternoon and playing Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, and twice on Sundays, with the matinee and the night performance. After the matinee, the cast would stay in the theater downstairs, and

usually my wife prepared the supper. We all ate down there in makeup and costumes, and then sat around and rested and played cards and games of some kind. And then when the night performance—it was much easier than trusting people to go home and get them back again for the second performance. Because it was something of a strain to play that intensively and also keep up your job during the daytime. We kept that up until the late '50's, when declining audiences, particularly on Monday nights, necessitated a change. We cut down the Sunday performances to one. And then we eliminated the Monday performance 'cause we couldn't draw people. Mondays and Tuesdays just became dead nights for theater. We eventually wound up, then, with our present system of playing weekends. We had to come to it. Other theaters were using it at the time and we thought that was rather silly, to keep a play in suspense that long a time. But we had to do it because we just couldn't draw houses in the early days of the week.

Then we did in '48, some of the plays—*Counselor-at-Law*, which was a good melodrama; it was by Elmer Rice. The first production of *You Can't Take It with You* was in 1948. When we revived it again, we had Blythe Bulmer in her original role as the mother, and we had Randall Ross in his original role as Grandpa. All the rest of the characters were changed, however, between the two productions.

I'd like to mention the play *Voice of the Turtle*, which we gave in May, 1948. It had only three characters, Jane Baty, Mariejeanne Walton, and Glen Judd. And it had to do with the story of a young serviceman who was on a leave in New York City, and he meets a young girl and goes to her apartment and spends the weekend with her. A three character show. The set called for three rooms; it showed



the whole apartment. It called for a kitchen that was completely equipped. And that was one of the best jobs we did technically. We had a kitchen in which the stove turned on, the electric stove. And the sink worked, and it had hot-and cold water, and everything was running, which sort of fascinated the audience. It showed three rooms, the kitchen, the living room, and the bedroom. And as you recall, we were on a small stage (at this time we didn't have our large stage), so we were cramped for space. So everything was considerably compressed. Parts of the set were just moved off, offstage, and the audience, on certain sides of the theater, could look off and see the rest of the room, for instance.

We had borrowed furniture from the Reno Furniture Company for the bedroom. And on the opening night, the two girls go into the bedroom. There's the girl and the other woman. The lead, which was Jane (Jane Baty at the time), went in and sat down on the bed, and she was followed in by the other woman, who came in very belligerently and sat down next to her.

Well, she came in and sat down next to her, and that was just enough for the bed to break. It collapsed, and the two of 'em were almost thrown on their back, and I've never had anybody completely collapse and break up as those two girls did. They just—it was the funniest thing. And the audience, of course, just thought it was the funniest thing they'd ever seen. And down in the front row was the owner of the Reno Furniture Company, and he got the biggest laugh of anybody. So when I went in the next day (I think there were storm clouds in my eyes as I went in because I wanted to get new bed slats to go under the bed), and when he saw me, he said, "I know exactly why you're in here." Then he went into convulsions [laughing], laughing about it. It was one of the biggest laughs in the show.

Back in the early days of our stage (this was in the late '40's) we had sort of a system where the university students who were interested in drama could come down and act as apprentices in the theater. They took turns doing different jobs. And one of the students, his name was Rex [A.] Jemison. He has since become a very, very successful attorney in Las Vegas. Rex's job for that particular play was to be the stage manager backstage. This play had to do with—it was called *Years Ago* [October, 1947]. It was written by Ruth Gordon and was largely autobiographical. The lead in that was played by Grace Edlind, who played the mother, and Joanne Garfinkle played Ruth Gordon, the role of the daughter.

The play was set almost entirely in the living room of this family. It was a divided set, dining room and living room. And one of the plot gimmicks of the play was that the family had a pet cat who was the favorite of the mother. And she rarely came on stage without going over to the sideboard and getting this cat, who was supposed to be sitting there under the sideboard. That was his hiding place.

As it always happened—I've never known it to fail—the woman who had to handle the cat the most, Mrs. Edlind, was fearful of cats. She had a "thing" about them. She just couldn't hold a cat in her arms. And she just dreaded, all the time, this business of, finally, when it came to performance, that she was going to have to actually hold onto a Cat. So I said, "Don't worry about it." I said, "I'll get a real harmless little kitten, and there'll be no problem. And you'll know it can't hurt you."

So I finally found a little kitten, a little white one. His name was Snowball, and he had a little black collar on him. And I said to Rex, "One of your jobs, now, is going to be to take the cat out on a leash in the back of the building just before the play starts, air

him, bring him back on, so we don't have any mishaps. I'm not goin' to take a chance.

Well, he did that the first performance. Then the second—oh, let's see, we got on—it was Friday night again. We got to the Friday night performance. I was downstairs, we were just about ready to start, and we had the curtain music on. And Rex came up to me and says, "I can't find Snowball."

I said, "What do you mean, you can't find Snowball?!"

He said, "I had him on the leash, and I took him out in back of the building, and he got loose, and he's gone."

I said, "He *can't* be gone! We've *got* to have a cat!"

He said, "I don't know what to do," and he was just shaking there.

I said, "Well, I've got to do something. Go back, tell them to play music and play music and play music, but not to put the curtain record on until I can come back with some kind of a cat."

So I went out in front of the building and I was looking wildly around for something, and there was a young boy there who had been active in the Children's Theater. He was just coming up Sierra Street, and I pounced on him. And I said, "Do you live around here?"

He says, "Yeah."

I said, "Do you know where I can find a cat?"

He said [speaking in a barely audible voice], "I have a cat."

I said, "Where do you live?"

And he said, "Just three blocks from here."

I said, "Get in the car." So he got in the car.

I said, "Go in and let me borrow that cat."

He said [in a babyish, soft voice], "It's kind of a big cat."

I said [frantic by this time], "I don't care how big he is. Just get him, please!"

So he went in the house, and he came out with the most vicious, snarling tiger you have ever seen! He was a mean yellow cat! And he snarled every moment of the drive down to the theater. And I thought, "Oh, this is going to be a night! I can see that," 'cause he was just barely lettin' me touch him.

So I drove up. I went in the backstage. They hadn't held the curtain, they had started the play. And I had this cat like this. And our gimmick to get the cat on stage was we'd cut a little hole in the scenery in back, under the sideboard. And so we would push the cat in just at the right psychological moment so Mrs. Edlind could reach down and take the cat out.

So I got there just in time. Mrs. Edlind was making her entrance, and she had to go get the cat. So she went down to pick up this little white cat. No one has warned her what's happening. And I pushed this snarling tiger through that hole and out onto the stage, and *he came out ready to kill* anybody around there. And Mrs. Edlind reached down, grabbed the cat, and then there's immediately a tremendous struggle for her to hold onto it. Fortunately, in that first appearance of the cat, she gets rid of him right away. So with this fighting animal, she gets him down there, and I reached out and I grabbed the cat and pulled him offstage.

Well, I knew that something was going to have to be done because we would never get through the evening. So I went out, and I was just cruising all over, trying to find our original cat that we had borrowed 'cause I knew I had to return him. I got over across the street on Sierra Street. Judge Eather lived, at that time, across from the theater. And up on the porch was a white cat with a collar on, a black collar.

So I ran up, got the cat, came back, got backstage. And I came up and I said, "Now we've got the cat. Let's hang Onto him."



And Rex said, "Well, we can't use him now."

I said, "You bet we're going to use him!"

He said, "But we can't change cats."

I said, "Oh, yes we can. It's the only way we're goin' to be able to get through."

So the next time Mrs. Edlind goes over to get the cat, out comes this white cat. And I thought the audience would tear the place down! It was the funniest thing they'd ever seen. And he was much bigger than the one that was our cat. And we got through all right. He was more tractable, and he took to the stage.

We got down between the first and the second act, and Wallace McPhail, who was the business manager out in front, came down, and he was carrying a little white cat. He said, "Why in the world can't ya take care of your cats?"

And there was our original little white cat! He had come to the front door of the theater tryin' to get in, and Wallace had let him in 'cause he was crying desperately. He was sufficiently trained in the tradition of the theater to know that the show must go on.

So we got him back there. And Rex said, "I know this is our cat because," he said, "I put perfume on him so he would smell good. And this one smells, and the other one doesn't."

So I said, "Well, the next act, let's—what the hell. Let's put the right cat on." I said, "If he's shown that much faith in the theater that he wants to come back, we're goin' to demonstrate our faith in him, and we'll use him."

So the next time we had a cat entrance, we used this little white cat, obviously smaller, and he came on, to much laughter. And that was one of our better experiences with animals.

We had an experience with a dog in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* [November,

1947], when Flush, the spaniel, decided that he wanted to count the audience, count the house. And on our opening performance, his owner was with me, sitting with me in the back. She was very proud of her dog, wanted to see how he performed. She was sitting there when Flush had his first appearance, and they went over and got Flush out of his basket and brought him over to Elizabeth. And he immediately crawls right out of her lap and goes down to the footlights, just starts looking for his mistress. And that was the funniest thing. And I just took Miss Rogers, who was next to me, and I pushed her down behind the seats, and I said, "Don't you dare make a move or ever let that animal see you (laughing), or he's going to jump offstage and come running up the aisle."

Flush got to the point where he was almost going to jump and start looking through the auditorium when the maid came to the rescue, got him, and took him over and put him in his basket and then fastened him with a chain. And that ended that one.

I have had the most fantastic bad luck with animals on stage that I got to the point, when I had to use a parrot in the play "Light Up the Sky," I finally decided I would use a stuffed parrot, rather than run the risk of having any more animals on stage.

Now let's get back to some of the other productions that we gave in the late '40's. This was a period of tremendous box office success. We had good plays to give, we had wonderful audiences. We had not yet completely recovered from the restraints of wartime. People had lots of spending money. There weren't too many places where you could spend the money, and entertainment really met the needs of most people. So our audiences were excellent.

And it was during this period that we made several significant improvements in

the theater. We added lighting equipment, and we threw out all the old seats that we had refurbished and bought all new modern theater seats, and also carpeted the theater, made several improvements of that nature. We bought a big quonset hut, put it up in the back of the building, and we used that for storage of our scenery. We were originally going to use it for the building of scenery out there. But it was too cold in the winter and too hot in the summer for us to use. So it was strictly a storehouse. Then we were saving toward an eventual addition to the theater, and these were the years in which we were able to put money aside toward an addition. The original mortgage had long since been paid off as a result of the wartime boom.

During these first years after the war, we also started our Children's Theater program. The first two years, we had a young girl who was a graduate of Stanford by the name of Janice Swan, and she presented five plays a season. These were given a minimum of four performances on a Saturday and Sunday, two performances of an afternoon. And we had complete sellout crowds for those shows. We had children sitting on the floor, we gave extra performances, we'd never had such a tremendous response. And the quality of the plays was excellent. We had good people, and we had good productions. Technically and artistically, they were well-conceived. And this girl did a fine job. Children's Theater was really booming at this time for us. When Janice left us, we then hired a girl who was a graduate of an East Bay women's college, [Barbara Haran]. She had had good dramatic training and came to the theater for a period of two years and also carried on our program of five plays a season.

These four years were actually the high point of Children's Theater. It's an amazing thing, but after the last girl—it was a funny

thing. After her second season, she left us and went back to the Bay area to be married. We then had Eve Loomis come in to give plays. And we reduced the number of plays we were giving because we found that it was— five plays, with our own six plays—. By this time, we were giving seven plays upstairs as part of our season ticket. That was almost too much for us to carry. It was too big a load.

So we cut back on the Children's Theater, but at the same time, the interest in Children's Theater dropped, just overnight, practically. And we never did get back. The quality of the plays was the same, but we never could get back the audiences. They had seen that we had gone through a phase of a certain group of children who lived in Reno who were interested, and when they grew up, grew past this stage, we never could interest them again. We did things like changing the age level of the plays that we gave. We started with the real youngsters, then we got up into the high school level, and used high school students in many cases, and university students in principal roles. We tried giving plays, then, after school as well as on weekends, tried every way we could think of.

So we kept it going for a period of— oh, up into the late '50's. I think we finally discontinued the Children's Theater altogether in about 1957. And we finally felt that we just weren't in a financial position to be able to keep that going. It needed some form of subsidization which wasn't available. And we sort of turned it over to the University to see if they wanted to carry the ball. And they did give one or two Children's Theater productions.

Of course, our aim was to get them young and train them to become theatergoers, and we would be developing our audiences for the future. And strangely enough, many of those children who were in those first children's

plays, or who saw them, later became our patrons of the adult theater, and still come more or less regularly to our productions. So the theory and the principle of it was wise; unfortunately, we weren't able to maintain it.

We did a number of revivals in this period of the late '40's. And they were revivals of good plays. I think *Arsenic and Old Lace* and *Room Service*, *The Little Foxes*, *The Man Who Came to Dinner*—these were all plays that were definitely worthy of being revived. And we did revive them, either in the late '40's or in the '50's.

The success of *Room Service* our second time [February, 1949] was equal to our first performance, which was given at the State Building, in which we had any number of catastrophic incidents take place. But it was such a wild, mad farce that we could cover them up very readily. That first performance had in the cast Grant Sawyer, who later became governor of the state. And he did an excellent job as the director in the show. *Room Service* has recently been revived even again in the last few years and was given by the ACT Company in San Francisco as an example of the best of farces of the late '30's.

We had such things happen in that production as the business of an actor dashing to the doorway to open it up, and pulling on the doorknob and having the doorknob come off in his hands and he wasn't able to get off stage. Another scene where two people were struggling over a typewriter, supposedly in this case, to see which one would be able to get to a pawn shop to hock it first to get a couple of dollars on it. In the midst of their struggle, the case fell open and the audience saw there wasn't a typewriter in it [laughing] at all.

We took the production to Susanville. We played on a long, long narrow stage in a movie theater. In fact, the stage wasn't ten feet deep. And practically everything was strung out

right across the stage. There was one scene in which Bill Miller had to make a fast bit of action around this furniture, and he came swinging around the sofa and slipped in the tin trough that the footlights were in. And his foot went down and hit one of the globes, and it popped with a loud explosion. He thought he was being shot at and turned around and stopped and looked at the audience, was trying to [laughing] decide whether he should get off stage or not.

Another time, there was a scene in which two characters struggle with a man and force him into a couch. Well, they carried on such an enthusiastic struggle, they forced him into the couch, he went down and it flipped over backwards, and it broke one of the legs off this brand new couch from the furniture store. We had just practically *everything* happen in that particular production.

Let's see. *The Little Foxes* was one of the best shows we ever did in the theater. Both productions [April, 1949; April, 1960], I felt, were extremely worthy and worth seeing. And we had a good script in the first place, to begin with.

Let's see, an unusual play that we did in '49 was *Duet for Two Hands*, in which we used our Children's Theater director, Barbara Haran, who played Randall Ross's daughter. It was sort of a weirdo play, having to do with a man who had the hands of a musician pianist grafted on his hands. And, of course, he played weird music, and so on. It was a little way out, but it was very popular with our audiences.

One of our least successful productions was *Command Decision*, which we gave in the winter, November-December, of 1949. This was a story of the Air Force in England. And it was an all-male cast, and it was a real handful. to get a play out of this group of people because they were all talented,

but a few of them were unwilling to put in the work to learn lines. So we got into the final rehearsals and opening performance in a very, very rough state. That first dress rehearsal (it was a Sunday afternoon), I was on the book, and I had somebody else on the book on the other side, and I think I threw practically every line in that play for some of the characters.

And on top of that, there were a few of the more playful ones who insisted on playing jokes with each other, so that when several big photos were brought out that were to show the results of bombing raids over Germany, they turned out to be pinup pictures, and were intended to throw the cast off their poise. They were already off their poise, anyway, I might say [laughing], due to the fact that they weren't sure what line was coming next. And, of course, those who did know the lines didn't know what cue was being thrown at them and what they were supposed to respond. It seemed to be a complete shambles, although strangely enough, there were many of our audiences who were unaware of what was going on and seemed to enjoy it. But as far as I was concerned, it was a ghastly experience.

One of our most delightful comedies in February of 1950 was *Two Blind Mice*, which featured both Blythe and Eve Loomis in the principal roles of two zany people working in a research office in Washington. The cast, supporting cast, was excellent, and these two people were incomparable in their character roles. They played well together, they were personal friends. Both of them had contributed—Blythe, of course, had contributed so much to the theater over so many years, and she was right in her element in that particular role.

In December of 1950, we did an experimental production of the *Madwoman of Chaillot*. This was an extra show because we

felt that the play was not the type of play that would appeal to our regular audiences. So we gave it as an extra experimental production.

We had a wonderful group of character women available, Gloria Gunn, Blythe Bulmer, Brownie Jackson—a fine cast. We had some excellent people from the University. Dramatic activities were not too heavy on campus, so student actors looked for other acting opportunities with us in the theater. We were very, very happy to have them.

Our first production of *The Torch Bearers* was in '51. We did an interesting war play having to do with Korea, called *The Traitor*. And that was heavily male cast. Somehow or other, even though we had a great deal of difficulty in finding enough men to fill the casts, our plays that were either all male or heavily male cast seemed to be very successful and very popular with our audiences.

Oh, we did a number of popular run-of-the-mill plays like *The Silver Whistle*, *Father of the Bride*. *Come Back, Little Sheba* was outstanding. This was a drama by William Inge, and we had an excellent, excellent cast with David Goldwater in the role of the alcoholic husband, Eve Loomis as his wife, Joyce Laxalt and Bob Moran as the young people. Joyce was the roomer in the household. Bob Moran was the young man at the University who later appeared in *Macbeth* who returned as curator to the planetarium and was eventually killed in South America.

*The Curious Savage* [December, 1951] was another play on the order of *The Silver Whistle*, a rather fey kind of humor, popular. Lynn Stetson played the lead in that. Don Hitchcock, who had come into the theater, was a young man who was in the insurance business here in Reno, and he had a natural bent for the theater. He could play any kind of a role, and he loved it. He later became very active on the Little Theater executive board; I

think he was chairman of the board in 1959-60. He played one of the principal roles in our twenty-fifth anniversary show, which was the musical *Guys and Dolls*. And he was extremely successful in that role. He played a lead in *The Curious Savage*.

And also, *Harvey* was given for the first time. And that featured Don Hitchcock in the leading role with Blythe Bulmer and Betty Stoltz, also. *Detective Story* was a popular melodrama that involved a double set, a large cast. It consisted of a series of small plots and the relationship of one set of felons with another, all coming into the police station. The principal roles were played by Sam Roberts, Juanita Elcano, and Bill Friel, who came to us from the University, and Bob Debold. Bob was a very active player with us during these years that he was going to college. He also appeared in *Macbeth*; he appeared in *Stalag 17*, and did an excellent job in every role he attempted.

In this same year, we had a very successful production of *On Borrowed Time* [November, 1952], in which we had the local Congregational minister, Warren Peters, play the leading role of Gramps. And Drew Loomis, who at this time was just a youngster (he was Cebe Loomis's son), played the grandson. It was a very touching, very effective play. It was rather demanding in its technical requirements in that we had to have an apple tree, because if you remember the play, these two people get Death in the apple tree and keep him up there until finally, Death is able to persuade them that the whole world will be turned upside down if he isn't able to come down from the tree. And he comes down and Gramps dies as a result. It was very effective. It still is an excellent play.

But I must tell you that in the production of *High Ground*, the first weekend we gave it [February, 1952], there was a very heavy flood condition in that part of town. Our

basement was the low point in that whole neighborhood. And everything backed up in the toilets in the restrooms downstairs, and backed up and filled our basement. We had water going from our basement clear out into the lobby, out through what was the Green Room, and into the lounge. We gave a performance the night of the flood. I had to get planks and put them out across the steps and build up things so the nuns in their habits could walk across these planks to get to the stairs and go up to the trap door and get on stage. So *High Ground* really had the appropriate setting.

It took place in a convent in England. And the principal characters were stranded in this convent, which happened to be on high ground. That's the background on that thing.

In 1952, I believe, we were invited to do a production at a drama festival that was being given in the Monterey peninsula. It was being held in the Pacific Grove High School, and we were asked to bring one of our productions. I decided, according to our bill of fare, the best play for us to do was a melodrama. Terrible. *High Ground*. It was about—it took place on a convent in England, and it had a rather lovely set, and the costuming, and all. I thought that it would be very attractive. And we submitted that as being our choice, the play that we wanted to do in the drama festival.

Well, we had sent copies of our program to the sponsors. In our program, we mentioned the fact that we had done *Macbeth*. So we got back from the play festival committee a turndown, but a suggestion that we please do our production of *Macbeth*. Actually, it was a production that was coming up. So it meant that there would have to be another play done between the time we did *Macbeth* and were able to take it down to Monterey Peninsula.

I didn't want to do it because it was a terrific chore to have to take a production



of that size and all those people down there for one performance. But they gave us the prime night, which was a Saturday night, the very best night for the whole run. There was a different show each night, and there were productions during the daytime, and so on. I finally, against my better judgment, agreed to take the production. We then made all kinds of preparations, based on the local performance that we had given here.

We did *Macbeth* here [March, 1952] with Eve Loomis in the lead and Randall Ross as Macbeth. Bill Miller from the University played Duncan, and we had some of his best students who played the other principal roles. In fact, we used all the cream of the drama department on the campus and the best people we had in our theater.

As you know, *Macbeth* has a terrible reputation of being a jinx play. Something, always unfortunate, is supposed to happen wherever it's given. I had given it—I don't know whether I mentioned it before. I had given it when I was in Susanville as a production, joint production, with the junior college and the high school up there, and had almost lost my mind in the process because my leading man was a very eccentric young man who was the son of the publishers of the newspaper, who spoiled him rotten. He was just completely uncontrollable. He was brilliant, but just what we could call a complete hippie right now. I had all kinds of trouble with him, but I managed, finally, to get through and do the production without losing my sanity.

In any event, I had worked at that time on a version of *Macbeth*, which had been cut considerably to make it easier to produce, and I used modifications of that same original cutting for our production here in Reno. We gave twelve performances and designed the whole thing to be a very intimate type of

production, since our auditorium was very small at the time. (We were doing this on the old stage, which was only fourteen feet deep.) we had a musical background that went all through the production. We had a huge Hammond organ brought in. The speakers were put down in front in our exit areas because they had to be muffled. We had original music that was composed for use in the production.

For our costumes, we did have to draw the line somewhere, as far as expense goes. So instead of accepting a bid, a quotation I had from Goldstein's in San Francisco, I took the bid that was given to us by the Salt Lake Costume Company, which promised that in many cases where they didn't have enough of the costumes in stock that we required, that they would make us new costumes. So that seemed like a good offer, and we accepted their proposal.

We went through a very strenuous rehearsal period. Finally, we got up to the last week, to the dress rehearsal time. We had a long rehearsal that night, and I remember we went down to meet the train after eleven o'clock that night, to take the trunks of costumes off and distribute them to everybody so they would all have them ready for the main dress rehearsal the next night.

We finally got them out of the baggage station and up to the theater, and then opened up the trunks. The whole cast stood by valiantly. It was now after midnight. And we got into the costumes. And you have never in your life seen such a collection of costumes for a production of *Macbeth*! They were all in the period of tights. And nobody could ever conceive of doing *Macbeth* using tights and doublets, and so on. When we got through all the trunks, we found that Macbeth's costume for the final act was a fire engine red, and Macduff's costume was a baby blue. Both of



them matched; they were made identically, except this violent blue. And they just looked so bad on stage. Lady Macbeth's costume for the sleepwalking scene was a long flannelette nightgown with a blue velvet robe on top of it—the most ghastly collection of things you can imagine!

Well, we tried those things on after we'd all had a very good laugh, which went on 'til about one or one-thirty a.m. We decided that we had to do something because we couldn't possibly go on stage with those costumes. So we went into our wardrobe, which, by this time, held a collection of everything you could think of, of anything that had been donated to us, or that we had scrounged from various places. And we went to the section trying to find tunics for the men. We got a lot of dresses, flannel and wool dresses, and found those that the men could get into and cut them off at the knees to make tunics out of them. Then we got into our fur section, where we had the fur linings for coats, and all that sort of [thing], and ladies' coats, and we tried to pull out all the fur we could. We cut them up into strips to make leggings and to make fur capes.

The next morning, bright and early, we went down to the Relief Shop and got all the old fur coats that they had down there so we could make more things. I phoned San Francisco and talked to Rose Goldstein and asked her if she could please send us a set of helmets with the horns, and so on, in the period of the Druids, with the round shields and the big broadswords, because they had sent us the wrong weapons. They were fencing foils. Everything was the wrong period. It was just unbelievable! So, she says [in a Yiddish accent], "Oh, you're trying to get something cheaper, huh?" [laughing]

I admitted that I had made a mistake and would she please help us out of the difficulty, and would she put the order on a

Greyhound bus and send it up so we would have it for that night. She did. She was very accommodating. And we worked all day long. We got very little sleep, incidentally, the night before, because everybody was improvising. You've never seen a bunch of young men pitch into something with any more enthusiasm than they did in making costumes, because I sketched out to them the basic things we wanted in the costumes; they could use their own imagination. And they did. They went through that theater and they found the darnedest things you've *ever* seen. And they made sandals out of fur—really, it was an excellent job! So that by that night, for our first big dress rehearsal (and we had an invited audience for that), we had a completely costumed play. It looked good, and somehow or other, it just lifted the cast. We were able to use a few of the costumes that had been rented, like some of Lady Macbeth's things. Some of the ladies' costumes we adapted.

We had an excellent opening, or tryout performance, you might say. And then we ran for twelve performances, and all in all, *Macbeth* was really a very fine success. We sort of put it in mothballs and got ready to do the next intervening production before we would have to revive our play for Monterey.

*Macbeth* was [a challenge] to all these university students. I mean, we had a wonderful, lively group. And they were always dreaming up ways in which they could enhance the production. And the final fight they just entered into with all the verve and vigor you can imagine. In one scene, the final battle scene in the last act, I remember Bill James took the most beautiful dive that you've ever seen, when he crashed to the floor below. It was one of the spectacular moments.

I might also add that this talent for improvising and for displaying great ingenuity was not restricted to the university students.

Because Bill Miller is one of the most terrific, the most damnable practical joker on stage of *anyone* I have ever known! On the Sunday afternoon matinee performance of *Macbeth* (this was when it was in Reno), I was sitting out in the rear of the auditorium. In the opening scene when Duncan and the sons and all the courtiers and everything were brought on, I noticed these little flashes of light. And I knew something was wrong! I went backstage and I looked, and Bill Miller had a water pistol under his robes, and several of the other players did, too, and they were having a Water fight on stage during the performance!

And I will never forget [laughing]—forget getting hold of Bill. Bill, who [laughing] had been in the theater for years and years, couldn't resist the opportunity to try to break up some of his students there. Now, if any of his students tried that on him in a production on campus, he would have killed them!

Another time, he was playing in *The Little Foxes*. And—did I tell this story? I'm not sure that I did. Glen Judd was playing one of the brothers of Regina, and Bill played the husband of Regina. He was standing offstage, and Glen Judd was there. His nephew was played by Pat O'Brien. Pat and his stage father had to plan a lot of the plot action. Well, they were offstage, and Bill turned to Glen and said, "Say, isn't that your cue out there?"

Well, Glen panicked, and he went on stage, and he was about twenty minutes ahead of time! He had cut out all of the plot action by making this appearance. I was sitting out back of the auditorium, and I saw what was happening. I got up and I dashed around outside the building and backstage. I got up to the wings, and I motioned to Glen to come and take an exit and come offstage. So he came offstage, and he came out, and said, "Oh, my God, I ruined the play! I've ruined the play! What am I going to do, what am I going to do?!"

I said, "Well, just stay calm. We'll improvise from now on. And so," I said, "you just go out and do these scenes."

I sent him out, and he had two breakfasts that morning. I don't know whether the audience noticed it or not. But he had cues that brought him out, that he had been eating breakfast. So he went on stage, and we got him off again, and then we worked in the other brother and the son came in. There was a bit of business that had to be said where a piece of violin was found in a safety deposit box where the bonds were. If we'd left this out, there wouldn't've been any play. So we worked this whole thing in and eventually got untangled without any apparent breaks in the flow of the scene.

When that play was over, I tell you, Bill had to run because Glen Judd was going to kill him for having gotten [laughing] him into that fix. That was really something!

Another time when we were doing *The Guardsman* [April, 1950], which is the story by Ferenc Molnar, and it's the story of the actor and his wife (who were such convincing actors), that he tries to see if he could fool his wife by his makeup and his acting to believe that he is a guardsman, and she plays along. You never know, really, whether she was taken in by him or not, or whether she thought it was another man. But that was the gimmick of the play. Sort of the catalyst in the whole thing is a drama critic who knows the two of them (he's their close friend), and he comes in in many of the scenes, ties the play together. Bill Miller was playing that role. And let's see. I forget. He had a scene with Glen Judd again, who was playing the guardsman. Glen had a very fancy costume that we whipped up for him as the guardsman, you know, with a wig and a full beard, and all. And he had to make this quick change and everything.

I'll never forget. He was talking confidentially, telling the critic what he was going to do. And he said, "And I'm sure that my wife will accept me as the guardsman."

And just as he started to say that, Bill had his hand behind his back, and Glen started to talk. Bill comes out, and he holds this flower that he had in his hand in front of him. And Glen reacted by saying, "I know that you will accept me as the gardener." (laughing)

These are all things that I can laugh about now. But believe you me, they were very aggravating. And they were probably one of the causes of my constant state of headaches in connection with productions. I always had a headache,

The production of *Macbeth* in Reno had been punctuated by one of the heaviest snowstorms we ever had, and we had to improvise because we still were operating on our narrow stage. In order to get from one side of the stage to the other to make an entrance, we had galoshes and umbrellas parked on the stage. And a character would come offstage (you will recall they're now in Druid costumes, so they're very scantily dressed), and they would go out the window on the south side (they had galoshes on and an umbrella), and then run around to the other side, come on, take off the galoshes, leave the umbrella, and make an entrance. In the meantime, somebody who was coming from the other side would take those [laughing] galoshes and the umbrella and run around. So there was such a heavy traffic backstage that it was practically unbelievable! I mean, this is outside the building, you see, between our quonset hut and the main building.

We had a similar experience to that when we gave one of the final performances on the old stage, and the contractors were already excavating in back of the building for the basement, which has subsequently become

our Circlet Theater area. We were doing a performance. I think it was a revival of *First Lady* [March, 1953]. And all at once, in the middle of the production, from offstage came these sounds of, "Help! Help!"

Oh, the audience at first thought it was part of the play. And then they realized that this just wasn't right! And I knew that it wasn't right, so I went scurrying back there to see where all these sounds were coming from, and discovered that a couple of youngsters had gotten in back, outside the building, and had fallen down in the excavation. They were down there and couldn't get out. And they were the ones who were yelling for help [laughing].

The next play after *Macbeth*, now that I think of it, was the (comedy). It was called [*Harvey*, April, 1952]. So we were all engrossed in getting this play together, and when rehearsal period got near the end, when it was supposed to open in Reno, I had to revive "Macbeth." But by the time we got to the revival, we found all kinds of things had happened. Let's see. Banquo had moved to Sacramento. Macduff came down with the mumps. Several of the other people connected with the University, we discovered, had prior commitments. Several of them were sick, and they were out of the cast altogether.

So I had to put somebody else in in the role of Macduff. I got hold of the young man, George Bennett, who had moved to Sacramento. He learned all the lines for Macduff and came up to Reno two nights after work on the bus, and rehearsed, and then Went back. And that was all the rehearsal we had with him, but he was a real quick study. He did all right. We discovered that the doctor in the cast would be unable to make the trip. As there was nobody else available, I was to fill in for the role of the doctor. The changes were so great that it was almost impossible

to try to keep up with them. And I had two shows going at the same time.

We were further complicated by the fact that we couldn't have the same set of costumes that we'd used in Reno because the festival committee decided that their budget would allow us to rent the costumes from the Goldstein company in San Francisco. So it was arranged that we would have these costumes waiting for us when we arrived in Monterey.

We then rented a truck, and we hauled as much as we could of our sets down with us. The sponsors were to provide all of the risers, the platforms that we were to use on stage. And they were to supply the Hammond organ, which we requested for our organist.

We had had the advantage in our Reno run of the assistance of a makeup man who was an old-time movie makeup man who settled in Sparks. He had come in the theater, just sort of dropped out of the blue, and volunteered to do makeups for us. He worked hard for those productions of *Macbeth*. He did the most beautiful makeup job you have ever seen, of the crepe hair work, beards, wigs, mustaches— everything, just a beautiful job! So we arranged that we would take him with us to do all of our makeups. But at the last minute, his wife would not let him go because she didn't trust him because he turned out to be a chronic alcoholic. She didn't dare let him out of her sight because it seemed that on the last night of our run in Reno, he had gotten so thoroughly smashed at the after-cast party that he was weeks getting over it. She just didn't want to run the risk of having this happen while he was out of town, and incidentally, out of her sight. So we traveled without our makeup man.

I tried to think of all the things that we could possibly put into that truck to take down in case we would need them. The sponsors promised to have their own sound

system for us so we wouldn't have to worry. And they would have the lighting equipment supplied for us. But we took a few things, anyway, just in case.

We got down to Monterey there on a Friday afternoon, late afternoon. The festival was being given in the high school auditorium of Pacific Grove. We asked to unload, and we finally had to get permission because school was just about out and they said we couldn't be in the building after school hours. Well, we said, "Well, we *have* to be in the building tonight to set up our set and to have a dress rehearsal."

The principal said, "No, you can't do it. The school board doesn't allow anybody to be in the building at night."

So we finally went to extensive telephoning with school board members and all, and we finally got permission to go into the building, and we could stay in 'til twelve o'clock. At twelve o'clock it was to be locked, and we had to get out. So we went in there, and we just worked like fiends tryin' to get all the details together.

In the meantime, we couldn't get the lumber that they were supposed to have for us for the platforms—nothing doing. Because the host group was giving their production in the downtown theater in Monterey that Friday night. So none of their group could be of any help to us whatsoever. We had to scrounge and do all this on our own. So we worked until twelve, and then we finally got an extension of time. We talked the janitor into sticking around and giving us another hour, and we worked 'til one o'clock and tried to get things set up without any platforms so that we could have them the next day.

Well, we got up real early the next morning, went down, and found that the lumber yard was closed on Saturdays, and we couldn't buy a stick of lumber anywhere.

There was nothing. So we went all through that place and scrounged. And we got tables that we found in the back of the school, and we used our big wicker trunks that the costumes came in from San Francisco. We used those, stacked them up, and then covered them with building paper and painted them.

Then the sound system, we discovered, was completely out of whack. It wouldn't work. So we had a young man who was an engineering student from the University who came down. He was our sound man. And he worked all morning rebuilding that sound system.

The setup down there was entirely different from what we worked in up here. The curtain was operated from one side of the stage and the lights from the other side of the stage, which posed quite a problem. The stage was tremendous, and the auditorium seated 1,500 people, and there was a space of about forty feet between the footlights and the first row because they had used the space for a large symphony orchestra, their high school orchestra. So the whole intimate atmosphere of our production had to go out the window. We had to bellow in order to be heard in this big auditorium.

Anyway, we worked all Saturday. Got through about four o'clock. And exhausted, we decided we would have a run through, a rehearsal, to get used to the stage and to break in all these new people, and all these changes that we had made in the cast. We finally ended the run-through, went out and got a hamburger, and then came back and we had to make ourselves up and get ready for an eight-thirty curtain. Well, by eight-thirty, we were all so tired and groggy that we weren't sure where we were! But we were ready to start, and with the fanfare from the organ, we opened *Macbeth*.

We were playing about three minutes, and we were in the opening witches' scene. The witches just about got to "When shall we three meet again?" (We used silhouettes of three girls' shadows that we threw on the back of the cyc, and we used three men's voices backstage over the P. A. system, who spoke for the witches.) All of which was fine, except that the scene was going just about two or three minutes, when all at once there was the most ungodly scream, and the P. A. system went out, and we heard no sound whatsoever from the witches. They were, to all intents and purposes, complete mutes. And [laughing] the rest of the cast came on and struggled valiantly, but it was pretty hard when you addressed a witch and you got no answer (the audience didn't know what was being said in reply), and it was really beginning to take on the appearance of a shambles. Backstage I was trying to get the sound system ready for the next scene we went into [which] was the heath. We had had in the witches' scene a big caldron which was smoking with dry ice and lights in it.

The next scene switched immediately to Duncan's castle. In that change, one of the actor's duties was to remove the caldron, get it off the stage in the blackout between scenes. But that particular actor used in Reno was not with us. He had been replaced with somebody else. And I had neglected to instruct this new person, in our one hasty rehearsal, that he had to remove the caldron. So we went into the scene in Duncan's palace with the caldron sitting out in front of the throne room, smoking like [laughing] mad. And that was just one more example of the things that were going to happen that night. Because if something is going to happen, they just seem to increase as the performance progresses, and they magnify in intensity.



So that by the time we got to the banquet scene and Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo, we had a set with a long flight of stairs going up, that the audience didn't know was built of crates and everything you could think of. And then we had two tall columns that we brought with us from Reno. They were made out of the cardboard cores of rug rolls. These decorations were elaborate with very fancy decorations on them and they were all painted beautifully.

Unfortunately, one of our crew, in his mad haste to get the set up, had forgotten to fasten it down. We didn't know about this until we got into the banquet scene and Macbeth (this was Randall Ross) starts to back up from Banquo's ghost, and he goes right up to the post and puts his hand up to steady himself, and the post just teeters back and forth. Fortunately, one of the guards who was standing there put a hand out and stopped it. So then Macbeth sees the second appearance. And what does he do? He goes back and does exactly the same thing, leaning against this post. Except there isn't any guard there at this time ('cause he's alone on stage). And sure, the post falls over onstage with a loud, hollow "plump," as it hit the floor. By this time, we had really turned *Macbeth* into something [laughing] of a Keystone comedy!

We got into the last act. And the young man who was substituting for Macduff—no. I can't think now [who] my characters—. Anyway, he was one of the principals. He goes offstage [at] the end of one scene, and then comes back on again and starts the following scene. But this young man goes offstage (he was subject to migraine headaches; of course, he gets one there), and he passes out! And he just goes out cold, and they—nobody can revive him. Nobody tells me (and I'm on the other side of the stage) that we've got to hold the next scene, so the curtains open on the

next scene. Nothing happens. Nobody comes out. And I don't know why they don't come out. And I'm waiting, and I send somebody feverishly around this huge stage and back to find out what's happened over there, and they sent back the word. I'm sure it was Macduff, that—it was the man who was filling in for Macduff. Now I remember. He couldn't go on. So we just had to close the curtains and skip that scene.

Well, this deletion threw the light man off because he didn't know whether we were going to count that as a scene, or if we weren't. You see, it was just—he was uncertain, and I couldn't tell him because he was on the other side of the stage from where I was.

And I, in the meantime, I'm suffering through in this costume that I'm wearing as the doctor. I drew a pair of tights, black tights. The crotch reached to my knees. And I could see that if I were to do any moving around in them, I was going to have one badly torn pair of tights. And as we had had enough things happen already, I wasn't going to risk having that happen on stage. So I discovered that when I got on stage, I would have to more or less be immobile. I just couldn't dare walk in this fashion.

So I started to sneak on stage. And this was the scene in which Macbeth comes on with his "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" speech, and it was, when originally played in Reno, a very impressive thing. Well, I got out onto a top platform and was supposed to come down onto the stage level. But before I could move down, the spots came on and picked me up instead of Macbeth, who was down on the stage because our light man was one scene off, as far as the lighting goes, and his cue sheet was wrong. When the lights hit me, I knew I could not move down where I was supposed to, and I had to stay put. So I stayed put and stayed where I was. As that scene progressed



and Macbeth moved from one beautiful speech into another one, the stage got darker and darker and darker, and I got brighter and brighter and brighter. And it seemed that it was the most ghastly bit of direction that had ever been planned [laughing], with this minor character getting all the attention and the principal actor out there in the dark.

But we got through the scene, and I recall that everything—we had a sleepwalking scene coming up, and that was—. Of all the times for Eve Loomis to forget her lines, that's when she picked, the sleepwalking scene. But the play finally came to a catastrophic conclusion. We got through it somehow or other. It was just a regular shambles.

Oh, among other things, in the throne room, the cape that Macbeth wore broke and started slipping off his back. And he kept clutching at the edges of the garment. If you can imagine him running around the stage, hanging onto this cape trying to keep it from falling. And I kept yelling out to him in a whisper, "Drop it! Forget it!" No, he had to have that cape with him. And it was just a ghastly piece of business.

I also remember that so engrossed was Randall in the progress of the play, that we were, oh, past the banquet scene when he turned to his wife, who was helping him dress offstage, and he said to her, "Ruth, is Semenza upset about something?" [laughing] The understatement of the evening.

Well, when we finished that production to thunderous silence from the audience, we didn't know whether we should ever make another public appearance again. But the sponsors came back and told us that we had to get everything struck on stage *and out of the building* by one o'clock. That night we had a change to daylight saving time. We had lost an hour in the process. And they made us stay there and strip that stage of everything that

we had brought in, and we hadn't had one bit of help. We had been working on a twenty-four-hour basis by this time, trying to give a performance to boot.

After we got out of the building, we were to go to a reception that was being held for us, a big party. We got to the reception, and it was around two o'clock, and we were pariahs! I mean, everybody, when they saw us come in, wanted to get just as far away from us as possible. There were no refreshments available. They'd all been [laughing] cleaned up! And we literally slunk away from the place.

They insisted that we had to go, even, to pick up the Hammond organ on that Saturday. They hadn't even arranged for it to be delivered to us. And we'd gone to the mortuary, picked that thing up. So they left word for us that we were to take it back at such and such an hour on the following morning, Sunday morning. That night I said to the fellows, "Take that Hammond organ and put it right out on the sidewalk in front of the mortuary! And that's as far as we go. We're doing not one thing more as far as Monterey is concerned!"

I'll never forget. I went back to the hotel that night, and I had a very bad, sleepless night. I woke up in the morning, next morning, with a ferocious headache, and we started out for Reno. I had a station wagon at the time, and, of course, it was loaded with props and scenery in the back. I put all the drapes in the back end, and I stretched out on the thing and tried to get a little sleep, to get rid of my headache. I shall never forget. My wife was driving at the time, and we got up onto one of those highway clover leaves down there, and she was unfamiliar with it, and so I said, "You're going off in the wrong direction. We've got to go toward San Jose."

So she got off the clover leaf, and I guided her, and then I closed my eyes, and when I

came to, she was back in the same spot, where we had been before. So then she got off the clover leaf, and when I finally was aware of what was happening, we were in the same spot for the third time! She had just been duplicating things.

Well, the whole thing struck me so funny by this time that we just all got hysterical in the car. We laughed all the way back to Reno. When we got back, the cast was waiting, having given the last performance of [*Harvey*], and they were anxious to see how successful we were in our production. Well, we told them, and they were all stunned. They just couldn't believe that we had fallen so on our faces.

I'll get back to *Macbeth*, incidentally. We arrived so tired and exhausted, and our cast couldn't believe us (we had a real party that night in the theater), and the fact that we could let down our hair and tell everybody just how bad we were helped. We had an account of it in the local papers. But people just didn't believe us. They didn't feel that the Reno Little Theater could fall on its face as thoroughly as we had.

For that occasion, the play was reviewed—oh, the whole drama festival was reviewed by Wood Soanes, who at that time was the drama critic for the *Oakland Tribune*. He was sort of the dean of the drama critics in the Bay area. And he used that production to have a field day! He accused us of everything you can think of, as far as our interpretation of those—. I remember some of the classic remarks. One of the greatest disappointments associated with *Macbeth* came when we had a party the following week, at which we read the reviews that we had received in the Bay area papers. The review of Wood Soanes disappeared, and I never was able to get another copy of it. But some of the phrases and clauses are still burned in my memory.

They were classic. He said that *Macbeth*, through three centuries, had been interested in many ways, but never had he been played as a mousey Clarence Day [laughing]. And he said Lady Macbeth was beset with some strange training in Delsarte theater of elocution, since her hands were constantly in motion. Bill Miller played Duncan, of course, and one of the characteristics of Bill's acting was that he always dropped his voice, and consequently, he called attention to himself 'cause he always underplayed everybody around him. It was a very effective gimmick, and he knew it and appreciated it, and used it. Well, he used it in this particular case, but we were playing in a tremendous auditorium. And the reviewer said that Bill Miller was too confidential for words [laughing].

Soanes just had a field day. He took every one of us apart and just cut us to ribbons. And, of course, he couldn't ask for any sort of apology. But we had never had such tremendous lack of cooperation in the presentation of anything. Needless to say, we wrote several scorching letters back to the powers that be that had dreamed up this festival and never again set foot outside of Reno to participate in any festival. With that dismal experience, we stopped any tours until the late '60's. I never even wanted to venture as far as Sparks with a production.

This production of *Macbeth*, as I recall, occurred in our last season playing on the old stage. The following summer, after our closing production of *First Lady*, we concentrated on getting the stage ready for the opening of our fall season.

Incidentally, I feel that this period, of the late '40's and early '50's, was really the golden period of the Little Theater. We had the best choice of plays for production because we were following along on what had been a good period on Broadway, and we had a wonderful

pool of talent available. Since then, many of these people have moved away or just grown tired of working in Little Theater, which is understandable, and drifted on. But at this particular time, we had some wonderful, talented people.

I was thinking particularly, however, of the play *Life with Father*. We had longed so to do that show and had to wait so many years that each time we would consider it, we would sort of figure out a tentative cast. When we finally did get a release on the play, we couldn't find anybody [laughing] to fill the major roles, any of the people that we had originally planned for the production. So our "Father" was sort of a complete discovery. He was an announcer at KOH. Let's see if I can recall his name—Larry Geraghty. And for "Mother," we had Blythe Bulmer. Blythe had always played up to this point strictly comedy character roles. This was the first attempt for her to play something that was comedy, but it was sort of a different type. There was a little bit of pathos and sympathy and sentimentality connected with it. So it was a good opportunity for her to attempt something with a change of pace.

We had several new people who came in this particular production. Betty Stoltz was a young secretary here, and she came into the theater, worked very actively in many capacities, and eventually helped us out in our first production of *The Little Foxes*, I'll talk about that a little later. Some of the people who were—Mark Gorrell was one of the boys, Michael Melner, and let's see, Pat O'Brien.

We had the problem in that particular play of having to dye the hair of at least five people, I believe. And with the exception of Michael Melner, who was a natural redhead, the rest of them all had to have the color removed and then redyed again. The second time we did it, which was just a few years ago, we had to go through the same horrible process again. And

I couldn't find anybody to do the redyeing job, so I wound up doing it myself with several cast members on Sunday afternoons. I learned how to dye hair [laughing]. I didn't particularly care for the experience.

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## PERSONALITIES IN THE LITTLE THEATER'S WORK, 1935-1953

I'll spend a little time and talk about the individual people who were involved in the very first season. In the very first play, which was *Three Cornered Moon*, the leading character was played by Blythe Bulmer, who had made a name for herself locally, both in high school and college dramatics, playing zany character parts; that was her specialty. Blythe played the rather zany mother in *Three Cornered Moon*. Her sons were played by Richard Hillman, who was also something of a known eccentric. This young man was from Sparks. He was an excellent pianist, and he played in a lot of orchestras all around town. He dabbled in everything, including theater. He was involved with us in the very beginning of the Little Theater.

Through this, I don't think I've devoted enough time to Blythe Bulmer. But through the years, she always appeared at least once. She started with us out of college. I think there was only one year when she was teaching in Ely that she was unable to be in a Little Theater play. But I think she managed; their school was out, she came in and was able to

get into one of the one-act plays that we gave after our regular season. So I don't really think she missed a year in those early days. But she was one of the first charter members, and did everything. She played leads, bits, prompted, gathered props. Of course, everybody sold tickets. I think she went through all of the various offices in the executive board and all of the elective offices, and now, she is in what is an appointive job as business manager. She has been business manager, I'd say, for ten or twelve years now. She has been on the executive board all these years. I'd say it must be at least twenty years. So she's been active in the guiding, controlling policy of the theater, in the selection of personnel, in the selection of plays, and our various financial adventures.

Randall Ross was the director of dramatics at Sparks High School, who came out to Reno from the Middle West. He had had some experience as a young man playing in stock companies in the Middle West. Naturally, he gravitated to the Little Theater when we tried to get a group together to form the nucleus. Randall was an excellent actor. But he had

difficulty learning lines, still does [laughing]. He played a young romantic interest in [*Three Cornered Moon*] opposite Evelyn Brussard, who, when she was in college, was Evelyn Anderson. And she played a number of leads in campus productions, including the lead in *Anna Christie*, which was one of the finest amateur characterizations to be seen around here.

Others in the cast—Jim Hawkins played another one of the sons. He was a senior, I believe, in Reno High School and was a student of Don Harvey Bell. Don was the director of dramatics in Reno High School. He had come to Reno from Idaho, finished up his last two years of college at the University of Nevada. He was primarily interested in writing, but got into acting sort of by the back door. He was definitely what you would call an intellectual. He was bitten by the drama bug so that when he graduated from college, he went to Reno High School and took over dramatics there. He was an excellent coach. He worked on plays with tremendous detail. Unfortunately, it was hard to put on a full length play and devote the amount of time that he demanded of his people in order to—. And when we were working on a schedule of five or six plays a season, we didn't have enough weeks left to give the production the kind of intensive care that he wanted to devote.

He had a very, very sharp tongue; he was a caustic critic. You might say that he was sort of our—acted the role of “the devil's advocate” because he usually bucked the majority opinion of everybody on the board. We were extremely fortunate in that regard, although at the time we weren't aware of it. We always felt that he was possibly a handicap to us, and that we would do so much better if we had a unanimity of opinion. But he always brought up a side that somehow or other was worth

considering. And I think that he prevented us from falling into many pitfalls because of his keen insight.

He worked very, very intensively, as I say, with his people. They benefited from this attention that he gave them. They all had a tendency to sound exactly like him, however, when the final play came off. But he was very successful. And a number of his one-act plays won contests in the state, and I feel that the Little Theater was very lucky to have him.

As an actor, he was a little bit too studied, yet his interpretations were always extremely intelligent. One of the finest things he did was his role of the professor in *Blind Alley*.

Our second play of the season—or, in fact, in our history, *Goodbye Again*, featured Hoyt Martin, who was one of our charter members. He appeared for a period of three or four years in at least one play a year. I think he's a semiretired businessman now, locally. His sister was Margaret Martin, who later was known as Margaret Martin Bankofier. He played the lead, as I say, and others were Helen Lewis, who had appeared with a traveling company of *Midsummer Night's Dream* that had been produced by Max Reinhart. Then we had Marguerite Brown, who was a local girl—rather, she had moved to Reno from Montana, and her aunt was a local insurance agent. Lloyd Bowen, who died last year, was for many, many years a very successful local businessman, and was one of the first of our actors. Another I remember in that cast was Rose Sala Bullis. She appeared, I think, for the first couple of seasons in various plays, and then she went into teaching and didn't have time enough to continue with us and eventually dropped out from the Little Theater.

I'm tryin' to think of some of the other people who played. There was a youngster, Darryl McNeilly, [one of the] first of our



young players. He and his brother Dean were children of a couple who were deaf-mutes, but were both very much interested in the speech arts. And in that first play, *Goodbye Again*, we used their boy. He was Darryl McNeilly, about nine years of age, it seems to me.

I'm tryin' to think of some of the other people that were involved in this first year. Of course, Randall Ross and Evelyn Brussard were in several plays that first season. We had such a small acting company we had to use them, and we had set as our goal the idea that everybody in the cast would play any kind of a role, whether it was a walkon in one play and maybe a lead in the next. That was our ideal that we had set. It didn't always work out that way because sometimes even our best players felt that it wasn't worth giving up another five or six weeks of rehearsal just to play a walk-on; I mean, when they had spent so much time in a heavier role in another part of the season.

[Some of the other names were] [William C.] Bill Miller, Allen Cromwell, Alice Couch, Frank Stout, Wayne Kennedy, Doris Shaver, Leona Fowler.

Leona Fowler came to the Little Theater in our very first year. She had been always interested in theater. She hadn't had too much opportunity at the University because at the time she was attending college, there was not a very active drama group on campus. But Leona was a natural actress. You could put a script in her hand and outline what the play was about, and she would come out with a marvelous interpretation. She was a joy to work with and a pleasure to watch. In fact, she was in so many of the key roles in our early years that I have to give her much credit for the artistic success of our productions. I think she came to us about the third—it was the third play. She worked as actress, she was on the board of directors, she contributed in any technical capacity that you could ask for,

and was just one of those people who was a real stalwart on which little theaters are based.

Bill Miller, of course, came to us from the University, since he was the director of dramatics up there. He naturally had formed associations with people that he had directed, and remained on a very friendly basis with them. And he enjoyed working in some plays in which he had some of his favorite people. Among them were Blythe Bulmer; my sister, Grace; Ray Frohlich; Margaret Martin Bankofier; and later, in our second year, David Goldwater, who is now a prominent attorney in Las Vegas; Leo Doyle, who had done wonderful work in high school and in college. Leo and David were an acting duo, and I cast them, I remember, in a comedy called *Boy Meets Girl*. And they did a wonderful job.

Dave, Dave Goldwater, played off and on in the Little Theater for a number of years, up to the war years. Then after the war, in the late '40's and early '50's, he was in at least one production a year until he moved to Las Vegas to practice law down there. He came back briefly in the mid'60's and played a role for us here when he was president of the American Savings and Loan Company.

One of our most successful plays in the old State Building just prior to the war was *Margin for Error*, which was written by Clare Boothe, and it had to do with the growth of the Nazi movement in Germany and its influence throughout the world. The play was based on a murder of a German, a member of the German consulate in New York. Coming in to investigate the crime was a Jewish policeman. And here he was coming in contact with this rigidity and the anti-Semitism of the Nazis. It was a very effective play. In the lead we had Dave Goldwater, who was a little bit hesitant about playing the role of the Jewish policeman. There was great intolerance in the community at that time for various things.



There was the feeling for anti-Semitism. And yet, he was willing to try. it and was extremely successful in the play.

Let's see, that's a play in which Blanche Clark played a role. Blanche came into the theater in these early years, moved to Elko when her husband who had a state job moved over there, came back to Reno, and played with us off and on for—oh, up into the late '50's, when her husband moved to Sacramento. And she hasn't moved back to Reno since then.

We have had many people—other people from the community who at one time or another walked across the stage of the Little Theater. There's Judge [Bruce] Thompson, there was Judge [Harold O.] Taber, Jack Cunningham, a county commissioner, numerous lawyers. Oliver Custer was not an actor and usually was very insistent on that point. But he was a tremendous help to us on the board of directors for many years and was our attorney without pay [laughing] for a number of years. I'm tryin' to think of some of the other people. University professors, of course, there were many, and right up to the present time Robert Gorrell, Dave Hettich, and George Herman. We've had, of course, a number of people from the English department. But we've drawn from other departments, too. Jim Hulse, who is in the history department, acted in the Little Theater during his junior and senior years while he was going to school.

Then, of course, Dorothy Caffrey made a name for herself in many excellent roles that she developed in theater productions. She was one of those supporters of the theater who gave her all whether she was acting or whether she was just selling tickets. I think she was the best season ticket seller we ever had.

Oh, I'd like to mention, in our second—let's see, in 1937, which would've been our

third season, we gave a production of *The Silver Cord*, in which we featured Leona Fowler in the role of the mother. This was a play written by Sidney Howard. It had been, I believe, a Pulitzer Prize winner, and it had to do with the possessive nature of a mother over her son. The son was played by Randall Ross. Let's see, I think Mildred Nagy Edwards played the girl in that. And then my wife, I think that's the play in which she made her first appearance as the maid. That was an excellent production.

We had a man who came to Reno to get a divorce. He was flat broke, but he was a very handsome man, and he fit the part of the other brother in the play. And we determined that we had to keep him alive [laughing] at least through the production of our play. So we had him move into our workshop, and he lived there, and we kept him fed during the six weeks that he was here establishing residence and while we were in rehearsal for the production. He was from New York, as I remember, all of which points up the fact that we had problems in those early days getting competent men who had the time and the talent to devote to plays. It's a problem that faces—and has faced— all the community theaters. Men just don't have the time to devote to this sort of thing.

I recall when we did *Accent on Youth*, which was in our second year, I believe. It featured Evelyn Brussard and Doug Dashiell, who was the football coach on the campus. And Bill Miller also appeared in that production. We had a young man playing the juvenile, whose name was Gordon Darling. He, too, was here for a divorce. He, also, was flat broke. And we had to find ways and means of keeping him alive. He had one asset in his favor. (You remember, this is in a time of depression; jobs were hard to come by.) He had a beautiful tenor voice, so I arranged to

get him on the program of various service clubs so that he would be able to get a free [laughing] meal at noontime. In fact, I think he sang for several of the service clubs, and I got him a job, also. It was winter; it was a very severe winter, and I got him a job with the city of Reno cleaning out the storm sewers, getting the slush and the snow and everything out of the gutters, freeing them. Unfortunately, he didn't have the clothing that went with the job, and he came down with a terrible case of—well, it was almost pneumonia. And he was unable to sing [laughing], so that dried up the free meals that were available. We had to take food to him. He lived in a little rooming house over here on Ridge Street, up in a garret, sort of. And we kept him alive, and he did a very fine production. We had to find the clothes for him, and everything. But he came through with a good performance, got his divorce, went back to California, and we've never heard from him since [laughing].

Now, some of these people, strangely enough, came in and out of the theater. And their beginnings were started either in college, with an association in college, or else they started with an association in high school. Now [consults notes], I notice the name of Jess Roy, who came in in 1937. Jess was a classmate of mine in Reno High School. She had married, I believe, when she was only a freshman in college, and had moved away to Oregon. She later was divorced and married a young man by the name of—oh, his last name was Lewis, and he was a brother of Helen Lewis, who was associated with us in our first year. She was the one who later went on to New York and became quite active in radio and in TV. And Jess was with us briefly when her husband, Lewis, was killed in an automobile accident, and then she moved here with her family.

Glenn Brandon came to us. He came more or less out of high school (he was a high school graduate), very much interested in theater. He was sort of a product of the Depression. He could find no job; he didn't go on to college. He had a lot of talent. His father was in the trucking business, and Glenn drove a truck, and finally persuaded his parents to put him on some sort of a driving job that would allow him to have his nights free in order to take part in Little Theater productions. He had a great desire to go on. He had lots of talent, but I think he tried to get into the Pasadena Playhouse, but was unable to make it. He lasted with the Little Theater, oh, for a period of three or four years and dropped out.

We had any number of high school teachers. Doris Shaver was one of them. My sister, Rena, was a teacher, and Blythe Bulmer, and, of course, Randall Ross. We had a very good character actor in the name of Jack Maack, who was from Utah, who ran the Penguin Ice Cream place here and appeared in a number of Little Theater productions in excellent character roles. He was a good comic.

The University also contributed Meryl Deming and Irving Sandorf and Loring Williams. And in the '40's, the late '40's, we were fortunate to enlist the interest of Bob Gorrell. He and his wife have been active in the theater ever since; it's well over—a period of—well, nearly twenty-five years, I'd say. And he has served in every capacity, from acting to working backstage and helping in the painting and redecorating and all of the dirty work in connection with theater. He's been on the board; he's served as chairman of the board. In fact, he's just about as active as anybody who's ever been in Little Theater.

I mentioned Rhea Stone, who was a high school junior or senior when he first appeared as the boy gangster in— well, he appeared in

a minor role first in *Boy Meets Girl*, and then he appeared as the gangster in *Blind Alley*.

Another teacher I might mention was Berry McAnally, who is now Mrs. Frietag. We had another young man by the name of Richard Sawyer, who lived with his foster mother and came to us through Don Harvey Bell, who was a teacher in the high school. Dick needed an outlet of some kind, and he worked in many, many shows in the theater, from I think his last two years in high school and subsequently after he went into college. The World War II caught him. He went into the service, went to OCS, came out with the mountain troops, landed in France on D-Day, or a day or two afterwards, and he was killed in the preliminary invasion of France. He was the first Little Theater member that we lost as a casualty of World War II. He was a tremendous help in those early struggling days when it was so hard to get people to help out in the dirty work, such as moving all of the stuff from our shop and studio, as we called it, up to the State Building stage. And poor Dick Sawyer was one that I always counted on, and many is the Sunday morning that I roused him out of bed and got him down to help move all the scenery up.

There was Dorothy States, who played character roles. She was the daughter of former mayor John Cooper. Venice Daniels, she and her husband, Arthur Daniels, were extremely active in the early days of the theater. Arthur died, oh, I believe in the late '40's, and Venice was around for a while. But she moved away and afterward remarried and dropped out of any association with her Reno friends. Emerson Wilson was one of the many attorneys who came into the organization. His work was primarily technical. I think I mentioned earlier that he had helped build the portable switchboard which we used. He helped us, also, with legal counsel.

I've mentioned Jack Cunningham, I believe. Jack was in any number of plays, came to us in the very early days. I think Jean Eller and her husband (his name was Willard Weller), they were a husband and wife team, had joined the Little Theater right out of high school, and they played opposite each other in the same play, during the war years, particularly, when manpower was rather short. And Jean Eller was an excellent ingenue, played in many productions.

There was one situation that was rather amusing, and that's when we did the play *Petticoat Fever*, which was in 1939. And by this time, the Wellers—Jean Eller was married to Weller, and he was beginning to get a little bit jealous. And I shall never forget. We were in the dress rehearsal, and I was sitting upstairs, and we had invited some guests to come in to see the tryout of the play. And the play had to do with a radio operator who was up in the Arctic, and a plane carrying some Americans was forced down in the area. And this young lady appeared at this igloo, or this radio station.

There was an opening scene where the ingenue came in, came on stage and saw the radio operator, and they discovered they had known each other previously. Jean came in and threw her arms around Bob Lackey, playing the radio operator. And when this happened, the door on the other side of the stage opened (this is during the dress rehearsal run-through), and out came her husband Willard. He walked over and said, "I've had just about enough of this." And he takes a swing at the leading man, Bob Lackey, who was about six-six. The disparity in heights was almost ludicrous. But before I knew it, we had a free-for-all on the stage.

A young fellow who'd been invited to the preview came over and said, "Gee, this is good!"

Is this part of the [laughing] script? Does this happen often during your rehearsals?"

I explained to him that it didn't. And before long, I was up from the balcony and was down on the stage and trying to settle things. We had sort of a cooling off period of a half hour or so, and then finally we went back and started in all over again, and we managed to get through that production. That was the only time when the jealousy of the husband and wife team made itself known on the stage.

In that regard, we had a situation with the play *Personal Appearance*. Jean Weller (at that time, she was still Jean Eller, her maiden name) was appearing in the role of the ingenue. And we had to stop—it was about the next to the last rehearsal before opening night. It was on a Wednesday night, as I recall, and she got sick after the play just started, and we had to stop the rehearsal. I went down, and I discovered that, unfortunately, she was just a little bit pregnant, and it was at the point where she could not possibly carry on. She was just as sick as could be. She had tried all week long (I knew something was wrong), but she just wasn't acting up to par. We were afraid something was going to have to be done to make a change in cast, but I didn't want to do it this late in the game. This was the dress rehearsal night, that's right. And there was only one thing to do. Finally, I had her go to a doctor that night, and the doctor said he couldn't guarantee that she would be able to go on without getting sick at some time during the course of the performance.

So we drafted Virginia Murgotten, who was the daughter of Dr. Murgotten, a German professor at the University, and she was holding the script during the rehearsal. She was the only one who was sufficiently familiar with the play to be able to go on. We worked all day Friday with her, coaching her on lines. She went home that night with the book after

she finished the rehearsal, that dress rehearsal, and worked all day Friday on the book, and came back, and that night she gave a very fine performance. She had the role mastered, and we had no need for her to carry a book or anything. She got through with it beautifully.

We had—oh, the second night was the night we had our problems with our leading lady imbibing too heavily. So that play sort of was a red letter production in the early years of the Little Theater.

Let's see. I think I've mentioned *The Silver Cord*. We had Mildred Edwards. Her name was originally Mildred Nagy, and she married Dr. Edwards, was divorced, and she sort of dropped in and out of the theater over the years. Then she married Mike Fisher. Oh, a number of years after she was married, I was able to get her back into the theater. Instead of playing the typical ingenue, she played a heavy in—it was during the '50's. It was a melodrama, a suspense story. I'll see if I can find the play—*Guest in the House*. And through some lapse on my part, instead of putting her down on the program as Mildred Fisher, I put her down as Mildred Edwards. She hadn't been Mildred Edwards in ten or twelve years. It was just one of those complete mental lapses. On opening night, when I went to the dressing room, I met her, and there she was with a program. She said, "And where did you get this name for me?" [laughing]

And I looked at it, and I thought, "Oh, oh." I realized. I had really goofed. It was definitely a Freudian slip of some kind.

I'm jumping around a little bit here. I'd like to get back, if I can, to some of the names. Older people in the community included names like Minnie Flanigan, who was so well known in the area and in the Century Club work. Let's see, the attorney's mother, Mrs. [Helen] Belford, Mrs. Sam Belford. She was on our women's advisory group and appeared in a

small role in *First Lady*. Helen Prendiville was active. She was known as Helen Mahoney on the University campus, played many dramatic roles, afterward married John Prendiville, and for several years while he was living and employed in Reno, she appeared in a number of Little Theater productions. I've mentioned, I think, True Gifford, who was later married to Judge Bowen.

John Fasson was an interesting character who came to us in the very early years. He was an Englishman who hit Reno at a period of the Depression, so he had difficulty. As I recall, he was an accountant by profession, but he worked at different things around Reno. He came to us, I think, through the Loomises. He had a beautiful English accent, and he was a mature person, in his middle forties, so he was able to fit in that particular gap. We always had difficulty getting people to fill the character parts, which seems to switch; now we have difficulty getting younger people. We have enough [laughing] older people involved. But in those days, John Fasson appeared in many leading roles and did not only English roles in the, more or less, you might say, social comedy dramas, but he also did character parts, played Cockney roles. He was one of those who left Reno just before the outbreak of the world war, and unfortunately, he never returned to the city.

Ben Moore was a young high school boy when he first came into the theater, largely through the recruiting efforts of Don Harvey Bell. Ben, too, got called into the military. He lost a leg somewhere en route and came back to Reno—he died a number of years ago—but never came back into the theater.

We usually had the experience that people would come into the theater, go away, and usually the magnet of Reno would draw them back, and they would come back into the theater. And it was difficult at times to keep

track of all these people and try to remember what play they had been in when they'd come back and say, "Do you remember me?" They were familiar, but often I couldn't remember what play they had been in.

Barbara Jo Douglass—I must mention Barbara Jo. She is Mrs. Jack Douglass, and her husband is now one of the owners of the Cal Neva Club. Barbara Jo came into the theater first in an acting capacity, and she appeared in numerous roles. As she had a happy facility for writing, she handled our publicity for many years, wrote advance news stories, planned ads, and also worked on copy for the programs, and such, and was busy with us for, oh, I'd say the first fifteen or sixteen years of the theater. Then, as so often happens, she got involved in other activities and drifted away and never came back to us.

Muriel Holland came into the theater in the first year. She was a bookkeeper at the old Humphrey Supply Company and then came into the theater among the first group and worked in all capacities. She helped in the business side of it, she also acted in different roles, helped in the costuming and gathering props, stage managing—did everything under the sun, anything you could think of.

Of course, we had such a cross section of the community when we did *The Women* the first time, in May of 1939. All of these names that I have mentioned, practically all of them, were involved in this production because we had over twenty-five or thirty women in all the various roles.

Helen Drake was a former professional actress who was a beauty operator. She appeared with us from one of the—oh, from the early years, I'd say from the third or fourth season. She was excellent in character roles, and she played the cook in *The Women*. Blythe played a maid in that, and the two of 'em had one of the most hilarious scenes in the play,



in which they discussed from backstage what was going on in the front of that particular household. As I said, it was a highlight of the show.

Helen had one difficulty, and that was the inability to learn lines easily. Memorization came hard for her, probably due to the fact that she worked such long hours during the day and just didn't have enough free time and rested time to be able to commit her lines to memory. As she grew older, this difficulty became more and more apparent, and it was hard for everybody to cover, sometimes, for some of her lapses of memory. I think the last production she did was in a revival of *The Torchbearers*. She played the leading character, whose name was Mrs. J. Duro Pampanelli, the director of a little theater group in a midwestern town. She was the artsy-craftsy sort of person. And Helen did a wonderful job but had a terrible time committing the many, many lines of the part to memory. She had these long speeches, and she'd get started on a speech and go right directly from one speech into another one that was somewhere else in the play. It was pretty hard to follow and kept the cast completely on their toes.

[Laughing] I shall never forget the dress rehearsal. Again, I'm glad this didn't happen in a performance. But it was supposed to be a scene backstage at the production of a play by this amateur theater group. The first act is in the home of one of the leading citizens of the community in which you see the cast gathered, rehearsing for a presentation of the play at the clubhouse. The second act is backstage as the play is in progress. And it documents all of the things that can possibly happen to a little theater group. This was the scene that was one of the funniest. Helen, as I said, in the role of the director, was gowned in a long blue velvet evening gown because this was a social event for this particular group

of people. There was one scene when she was ranting and raving, and one of the characters came offstage—I think it was Jim Hulse, who was playing the young office boy in the scene. He's supposed to come offstage, and in a series of quick scenes, he says, "There's no pen and ink on the desks There's nothing out there," all these things. He'd open the door and holler all of these catastrophic words to the people backstage, and they would completely panic, and try to improvise to cover for all these fluffs. There's one bit when the office boy finally gets the chance to come offstage, and since he's gone through such hell while he's been out there, he comes offstage and faints. And Mrs. J. Duro Pampanelli is supposed to catch him.

Well, Jim came offstage, and he goes into his faint, and he does such a beautiful faint that he's a complete dead weight. And he goes into Helen's arms. She had turned around and just barely saw him there. As she was extremely nearsighted, she wore very thick glasses. As he came against her, she went down. He brought her right down onto the floor, and they spread out on the floor, and her glasses flew off on the stage. She knew that she couldn't carry on without her glasses 'cause she couldn't see two feet in front of her. So there was this hilarious scene, not in the script, in which she was going around on hands and knees on that stage, with her hands out, trying to find her glasses. Jim Hulse was in convulsions [laughing] on the stage at what had happened.

Well, among other things in that particular play, as I said, Helen would always blank out. There was one scene where she said, "As Abraham Lincoln said," and the words that followed [were], "in his Lincoln's Gettysburg address." And she couldn't think of Gettysburg. So, "As Abraham Lincoln said in—" And four other people on stage would



try to fill in. But at no time would she ever blow up in the same place. The cast would get together backstage, and they'd say, "Well, now, if she blows up here, this is what we'll say, and this is what we'll do." And [laughing], I said, she never did it in the same place, so that they were never prepared for the moment when she was going to go up in her lines.

There was another character in the play; his last name was Drake. And he played the husband of Cebe Loomis, and he, also, had difficulty learning lines, not because he couldn't but because he wouldn't. He couldn't be bothered learning lines; it was just entirely too much work.

There was a scene when he was on stage with Helen Drake (their last names, by coincidence, were the same). And the two of them went up in their lines, and there was only one person on the stage with them, and that was Cebe Loomis. And she was supposed to be out in the anteroom waiting with absolutely nothing to do with what went on downstage. She was supposedly serving refreshments to these people. She came on during the long pause, had no lines in the play, and I can remember her coming on with this plate of supposed candy which she would serve to the two Drakes. She'd go up to Fred and say, "Would you have this, hmmm?" And then she would go to Helen and ask her the same thing. And she just kept this up, going back and forth, trying to cover, but having no way or opportunity to throw the lines to them. Meanwhile there was this deadly pause that went on and on. Finally, we hurled the line out from backstage, and they got started again. Cebe came offstage, and she was practically [laughing] in shock from the harrowing experience that she had been through.

We subsequently revived that play, oh, about ten years later, but it was not quite as

successful as the first time. The play was a little bit dated by that time.

My sister-in-law, Juanita Elcano, was appearing in and out of these various plays. Her specialty was Cockney roles. She played Cockneys of all ages—young, middle-aged, character parts.

*Our Town* was one of our most successful productions. It has one of the final productions in the old State Building. It had the blessed advantage of not requiring a full stage set. And we were extremely fortunate in the casting of the production. We had a lot of people in our theater who were New England types. We started with the stage manager, who was Loring Williams from the University faculty. He had just the right speech pattern that suited his lines, and he did an excellent job. We had many university people, students. This is when Bruce Shelly first came into the theater. He was just a young boy, and he played the newsboy. Bruce was Blythe Bulmer's nephew. Later his parents became interested and came into the theater and were active during the war years, and Carl [Shelly] for a period of time was president or chairman of the Little Theater executive board and helped run the theater.

Lucile Snider Parks was a local "character" (I put that word in quotes). She was a very big woman, a very domineering type. She was active in club circles and musical circles. She was a singer herself, and also conducted and trained a chorus of women. She had an extremely high opinion of her ability as an actress. She could do fine work, but she was almost impossible to direct, very, very difficult. She antagonized the other cast members, she imposed upon them, she would hit upon some poor unfortunate and insist that he take her home after rehearsal. And she lived, at that time, in what was considered way out in the country, out by the golf course. Other

cast members rather resented that after a late rehearsal they'd have to be carting Lucile Snider Parks around the landscape. She did a magnificent job, however, as one of the mothers in *Our Town*. She later appeared in several other character roles in which her ego was greatly inflated and made her so difficult that she became too difficult to work with, and we tried, if possible, to avoid her, using her *only* if there was absolutely no one else available.

Jess Simpson was an itinerant painter. He was in his early thirties, I guess, when he came to Reno in the days of the Depression. He was not terribly talented as an actor, but he was a man, and he filled roles, and we had to have manpower. Jess was extremely helpful, however, on the technical side of production. He helped build and paint so many sets that his name was practically a permanent part of every program listing the staff. He was with the theater during, I'd say, the first six years, and then for a period of about four years after World War II. He was called in the service and served out in the Pacific theater, came back, but then eventually moved to California, and he dropped out of sight.

I think I've mentioned other prominent people that have come in. Helene Feutsch is Mrs. Carl Feutsch now; she came to us via the University drama department where she had been active in her undergraduate days. James Johnson, I think I've mentioned him. He's now an attorney. He started in while he was in college. He appeared in a few University productions, and also appeared in numerous Little Theater productions, also played in a production of *Murder in the Cathedral*, which was given by the Episcopal chapel up near the campus at that time. And he was quite active, came back to the theater after many, many years of being away from us back in the '50's, and played one of the principal roles in *Streetcar Named Desire*.

*Room Service* I think I have mentioned. Incidentally, another University professor who was involved was Anatole Mazour. He taught Russian history. He was a Russian, had a marvelous accent. And he played the waiter, the Russian waiter, in *Room Service*, did an excellent job, came back, played in a number of shows, and then he went to Stanford and was on the faculty at Stanford until his retirement. He came back just a few years ago. I can't remember; it seems to me I had him in another production, just one part in the year that he was here. And then his wife didn't like Reno, so they moved someplace else.

I knew there was something that came to my mind here. There was a name that appeared in the news in December, [1970], shortly before Christmas. Do you recall there was a Pat Rippingham who drowned in Pyramid? He was one of the children who was in the choir in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, which was the opening production in the new theater, in Dania Hall [1941]. And also in that play was Carlo Panicari, who is a contractor here. He's the manager of one of the contracting, building firms. Helen Drake also played one of the principal roles in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, in this first production. Also in it were Dorman Patten, a local insurance broker; Lucile Snider Parks, and the Wellers, Wallace McPhail, Randall Ross. And Richard Hillman, who was one of our charter members, turning up again.

I think I've mentioned the plays that we did the first year after the war years. That first season was when we did *Joan of Lorraine*, and I [mentioned] the difficulties we had there. And *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, which we gave in 1947, was one of the most successful productions of those late '40's because we had one of the finest casts that I have ever been able to get together. There was a young girl by the name of Betty Wilson, who was

attending the University, who played the role of Elizabeth Barrett. That's when Jane Baty (at that time; now known as Jane Tieslau) made her first appearance. And we had a University English instructor by the name of Meta Ann Winston. She was one of the sisters. And among the brothers, we had Larry Means, George Bennett (whom I've mentioned previously) , and John Nash.

John Nash was the son of Mrs. Norman Biltz, and I saw him last Saturday night (1971) for the first time since that production. He was back in Reno. And across the room, he looks just as young as he did in those days. He was not very active in the theater. But he remembered the production of *The Barrette*.

Glen Judd played Mr. Barrett, and it was one of his most successful, one of his heaviest roles. He was wonderfully villainous in that. Joyce Nielsen was an ingenue. Joyce is now Mrs. Bob Laxalt. Bill Rollins, who is Monk Ferris's son-in-law, also played in the show.

That was a production in which a young man by the name of Stanley Smart became enamored with Betty Wilson, the lead. And he wanted to marry her. In fact, he drove her crazy proposing to her. Finally, word came to us one performance, just before the performance started, that he was planning to get out on the stage and propose to her in public so he would put her on the spot so she couldn't—. He was obviously mentally unbalanced. I got word of that and pulled him out of the cast, refused to let him go on. I put George Bennett, who was playing a minor role, in the part, and we sort of ad-libbed through that performance, and I was prompting him from offstage. George was a very quick study. He was sort of familiar with the part anyway, so he got through in the part. it was a very critical role, and it had us all upset. But it was better to do that than take a chance on having this young man

get out and throw everything into a state of consternation.

As I said, he was a very mentally depressed young man. And shortly after that, he did succeed in committing suicide, which was a rather grim note on which to conclude a production.

Playing the role of Browning, Robert Browning, was a young man by the name of Morton Lichtman, who afterwards went from here down to the Bay area and the peninsula and played many, many leading roles for the Palo Alto Community Theater. I followed his progress through their exchange programs and through newspaper reviews in the San Francisco papers.

I'd like to say a little something about Glen Judd at this time. He came to us in our early years, I think about the third or fourth season. I was casting for a play called *Nine Pine Street*, and this young man came up. He had a wife and two children, and he worked for the Southern Pacific. He was working in connection with providing meals for the section hands out east of Sparks. He would come into Sparks in the evening, so he had his evenings free. He saw the notice about tryouts, so he came to Our tryouts. I had him read, and I was instantly impressed, and I asked him to stay afterwards and read the part of Danny in *Night Must Fall*, which was a play that I had always wanted to do, but I had to find somebody who could play the Cockney lead. I handed the book to Glen, and I asked him to read the part of Danny, and I told him that he was a Cockney, and he was to take it from there and see what he could do with it. I've never heard anybody who read anything as well as he did at sight. And then and there, I junked *Nine Pine Street*, and I never did give it, but decided to do *Night Must Fall* [March, 1941]. And so with Glen in the role of Danny and Leona Fowler as Mrs. —can't think of

her name now, but the woman on whom this young man preys—.

Afterwards, I asked him what dramatic experience he had because he did such a beautiful job. He had none outside of a little school dramatics. He had been raised in the Mormon church in Utah and had taken part in many of their church activities. The Mormon church does develop talent in the speech arts. It was wonderful what it did for Glen. He had never seen a professional, legitimate play in his life. I'd say he was the finest natural actor that I ever had come into the theater. I used him in many excellent roles. Never has a man had more opportunity to play great roles than Glen had. And it was difficult for him, because, as I say, he had a family, he worked hard during the day, and it was hard for him to find the time to learn lines.

Another one of his best roles was the father in the *Barretts of Wimpole Street*. He also played the father in *The Heiress*. He played the young juvenile in *The Voice of the Turtle*. He could play any kind of a role.

You may or may not recall that *Night Must Fall*, the play that first introduced Glen to our audience, was the story of a bellhop in an English rural area who is a psychotic—in fact, he was a psychopath—and he carried the head of his victim around in a hatbox. And he conned this old woman, this old widow, into letting him live in the house, and he was preparing to “do her in.” It was quite a dramatic sort of melodrama. And Glen did a great job. It was one of the most successful productions of the theater.

So it was natural that I would turn to him for the first show back in the Little Theater after the four years that I had been away. I used him and Cebe Loomis, who had been very prominent in the early days of the theater. In fact, she played one of the leads in *Daughters of Atreus*. She appeared in any

number of excellent productions during the Mansfield regime. She was in *Philadelphia Story*; oh, she played in several revivals, *The Guardsman*, and also in *The Little Foxes*, a revival production of *The Little Foxes*.

*The Little Foxes*, incidentally, was, I felt, one of the finest shows we ever did. I gave it twice, the first time with Evelyn Brussard and Bill Miller in leading roles. Glen Judd was in that one. The second time I did it with Cebe Loomis in the lead. In the first production, we had Jane Tieslau. When she was going to college, she was known as Jane Baty. And I discovered her in one of my public speaking classes and interpretation classes and got her interested in the theater. During her years on the campus, she played in many Little Theater productions, including—I think the first thing she did was the younger sister in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*. After she graduated from [The University], she played with Glen Judd in *The Voice of the Turtle*, later came back after she was married and had moved away. She and Boyd lived in Quincy for a number of years. She came back and played in *Streetcar Named Desire*. And then she and her husband settled in Reno, so she appeared in a number of productions after that. I guess it's just been the last couple or three years that she has sort of semi-retired.

One of our successful comedies in 1948 was *Made in Heaven*. I was going to mention the name of the playwright who was a very well-known short story writer. Hagar Wilde was a personal friend of Rankin Mansfield's. He knew her in New York. She had a flair for dialogue. This particular play was very, very, very funny. And some of the names in that were my sister-in-law, Juanita Elcano; George Bennett again; Leo O'Brien, who was known as “Pat” O'Brien. He was a university student, played many successful roles in the Little Theater, and he went into the Army as

a career and has come back periodically with his five or six children. He hopes eventually (he's retiring this year) that he'll come back and live in Reno, and he'll continue his acting career in the Reno Little Theater.

There was a Helen Lownes Jackson, also known as "Brownie" Jackson, who appeared in this show, and she was a *wonderful* character type. She has remained a great personal friend over the years. Her mother, Therese Noble, was married to a former president of Williams College, but she moved out here. She was a Lownes, one of the thread manufacturers in New England. And she came out here with her second husband and lived a number of years in Reno. Brownie, her daughter, now lives in Santa Barbara. She is still alive. Mrs. Noble has one of the finest art collections in the world, the value of which will never be known until after she dies. She is in a rest home, completely senile. She has the original Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington, which is on the postage stamp. I've seen that in her apartment in New York. She has just a fabulous collection of oil paintings and sculpture.

And Brownie, who was an amateur artist herself, was interested in theater and did a great deal for the Little Theater while she was living here, appeared in numerous roles, and always was a contributor, a life member, and did all the things that she could, helping in many capacities. She did have to go back to New York, had an apartment there, and has since moved to Santa Barbara, where she now resides.

It was during this year [1949] that we also did a revival of *The Women*. As is usually the case, the revival was not so successful, not as successful as the first production, and never is, usually, because the situations change. The times were different. The reaction to the play was not quite the—. It's still funny, but you

realize that it was a little more venomous than humorous. And the people were not nearly so likable. It was really rather bland after all that we'd gone through with the first production.

We also, at this time [during the late 1940's], had the addition of Gloria Gunn. She was the wife of a University professor; Ira Gunn was his name. He later became, for a short time, city manager in Reno under Baker, in the Baker administration, I believe. Gloria had attended the University of Nevada. I had first met her when she was taking some drama courses when I was filling in for either Bill Miller or Bob Griffin. She was extremely talented. I was very happy to have her come back to Reno. And the part she played in *Parlor Story* was sort of a warmup to an eventual appearance as Sadie Thompson in *Rain*.

Then in April of '49, we did *The Little Foxes*. This had been one of my favorite shows, and I was looking forward very keenly to casting it. As you know, it has to do with the Old South during the period following the reconstruction. We had the problem of casting two Negro characters. One problem was solved very readily when we were able to get a young football player by the name of Alva Tabor from the campus, a very intelligent, extremely likable man, and he played the role of Cal.

Finding the woman was another problem. We had a Mrs. [Edwina] Hamlet, who had received her education in Negro schools. She had worked hard for the advancement of the cause of the Negro, and she wanted to do something because she felt that it was good to build up the status of the Negro in the community. But she objected strenuously to the idea of playing what they called in those days was a "field Negro," complete with heavy accent and all. The play was built around these people, and it was very important that they be



Negroes of this particular economic level. She said she was willing to try it, but immediately, I ran into the mental block of the accent. She spoke without an accent, she was proud of the fact that you couldn't recognize her Southern ancestry, and she was really inwardly rebelling against this background. The result was that she could not absorb the part. She couldn't learn the lines, she couldn't learn the business. Either in one rehearsal she would learn the business that she was to do and forget the lines, or vice versa—remember the lines and not the business. Never could she remember the accent.

Well, anyway, I went on week after week after week hoping that it would be better, and that she would eventually work into the role. But I finally got up into the last week of rehearsals when we were in costume, and I thought, "This will make the difference. Suddenly, she'll realize that this is a play about real people and that she's going to become one of the cast and be able to play back and forth with the other people."

We finally went into our first preliminary dress rehearsal, and she had the opening scene. The curtains opened. She just didn't know where she was or what she was doing. So I finally went up on the stage, and I said, "Let's think of this, Mrs. Hamlet, as a series of steps in which we do everything by numbers. Now, one, the curtain opens; and two, you start dusting this couch; three, you start arranging the pillows; four, you move over here, you change the flowers; five, you go to the door, you check this; and six, you go to the window and you check that, and so on. And then, when the first person comes in, you say this," and I repeated what the line was, and so on. She stood there, and I was sure that she had it. So then we went back, and I said, "All right, now, let's start the play all over again."

So we closed the curtains, then we opened them. Mrs. Hamlet was out there, and she said, "One, the curtain opens. Two," [laughing] "let's see. Now, two—oh, yes, I dust off the sofa, and three—," and she went through all these things, and she got lost after about the count of six or so. And then she said, "And then somebody is supposed to come in and I say something. Now, I'm not quite sure just what it is."

This is after over five weeks of rehearsal. You can imagine how we all felt, knowing that it was just absolutely impossible. So I limped through the rehearsal, and I called our script girl, who happened to be Betty Stoltz, and I said, "Betty, do you think you can get up a Southern accent? Will you be willing to put on black-face makeup and attempt to do the part?"

Betty was up to anything. And she did, and she watched the rest of that rehearsal, the business, very closely, and then afterward I had the very—this is the hardest thing, to take somebody out of a play. You're always happy to be able to offer them a part, but to have to say they just can't cut it is a very difficult thing. And I had to explain this to Mrs. Hamlet. She agreed that she didn't want to get on stage and embarrass herself, the theater, and her community, her church group, and so on. So I managed to get her out of the cast. She did come and attended a performance, and she thought it was great; as far as she was concerned, it was a whole new experience for her. And Betty acquitted herself in fine style, did a very good job.

I'm not sure whether I should bring in one of the unpleasant personal situations, and maybe I should mention names or I shouldn't, but I had a personality clash between two principals, the lady playing Regina, who is the lead (this is the Tallulah Bankhead role), and the man playing her husband. I don't know



whether you're familiar with the story, but he dies of a heart attack. She hates him, he hates her, he hates her whole mode of living, he hates the way she's raising her daughter, and so on. And in one of the most dramatic scenes after a real fight, he has a heart attack, and he reaches for the pills which are in the bottle on the table, and he asks her for them. And she is supposed to move to get them and debates whether to give them to him, and then finally just puts them on the table beyond his reach, and goes upstairs, and allows him to die.

Well, these two people could not get along. And they had a terrible scene after the final dress rehearsal. She told him that he was incompetent in just so many words. And he said, "Well, I'll show you how incompetent I am." And then he spouted off something or other. He said, "I'm going to die a different way every single night so that she isn't going to know what to expect next. One time I'm going to knock the pills in one place one time, and another place another time, and she's just going to be off her poise at all times, not knowing what to expect from me."

He did, to a certain extent, but she was equal to the situation. And as far as the audience was concerned, that was one of the most effective interplays of the characters that they had ever seen. They really [laughing] went at each others I've never seen anything quite so vivid, almost a little bit too much, because it was rather unpleasant as far as the rest of the cast were concerned. We had no such clash the second time we gave it, when we had a revival.

Let's see. I might add that the result of this hostility between the two characters was such a strain on the rest of the cast that we got up to the Saturday night before we were to have our opening dress rehearsal (which was always a Sunday afternoon), and one of the characters in the first act (it was a small role) called me

up and said, "I can't go through with it. I can't be in the play. It's just too upsetting for me to go through this experience."

I said, "But you can't do this!" I said, "It's just— you've got to help out on this thing, and everybody's got to pitch in. Here, we've had a replacement, the part of the colored girl. We have this feud going on between two of the principals." I said, "You can't back out now because I'm the only one who can step in in this thing."

And he said, "Well, I'm just—I thought I would tell you now," (this was a Saturday) he said, "because I cannot and I will not be here tomorrow afternoon."

So here was my dilemma: he was about six-three and I'm only five-nine, and it meant finding a costume because it's a period show. I said, "Will you *please* make an effort to get there?" I talked to his wife and tried to make her see how important it was that he come and be in the play 'cause he'd rehearsed, he knew his part perfectly, he was excellent in it. But he never showed up again, and I had to go on in that show. I had to play all the performances. He never did come back during the run.

So that one was more or less [an] ill-fated play, but despite all of these handicaps, it was one of our most successful productions. And I was gratified because I liked it.

The second time we did the show, we had our new stage. I had Cebe Loomis in the leading role. She was excellent to work with. And since we had all this room on the stage, we used a set that was fifty feet deep. We showed three rooms, so that we were way back into our shop with a room, and I got a great thrill out of watching these people coming from that distance and moving downstage and gradually coming into the forepart of the stage.

We had a revival of *The Women* in October of '49. think that was the closing

production of the season. In it were a number of names of people who are still residents of the community. Helmi Horgan was the widow of Tom Horgan. Patricia Homer, who is now Patricia Goldwater, had been with us in the very first production of *The Women*. She had played a manicurist, and in this revival she played one of the leads. She was the other woman. Then we had Marjorie Da Costa, Hope Roberts, who has been active in club work since she left the Little Theater. We had Margaret Eddelman at that time, who played the little girl in the cast. Margaret has since grown up and gone back East. We had Betty Stoltz play in it again, and Bobby Bender, who is Mrs. Frank Bender, and Phyllis Saviers Goldwater. Helen Drake, our old standby, was in it, and Barbara Smithwick, who later went on and became very successful in TV commercials. She had several large national accounts. And Virginia Questa, Adelyn Rotholtz were all in it.

One of the difficult plays to do, because it depended so much on proper casting, was *Born Yesterday*, which we offered in October of 1950. In fact, it was our first production of the season. Here, again, was another play that we had tried and tried and tried to get a release on, when we had the people available. But when we finally did get a release, we had nobody to put in the role of the girl. It was a particularly difficult part to play, and there was just nobody in our group. So I advertised for tryouts in the paper. We didn't have too much difficulty in getting our male leads. George Vargas played the principal role of the big garbage man. And a young radio man by the name of Gene De Alessi from one of the radio stations played the other, larger role, new role. Howard Babcock played a number of roles with the Little Theater, moved to Las Vegas, and he is now a judge down there, was recently the judge presiding in the Maheu

trial. He had an excellent reputation in the legal field.

I was in the box office at the theater one afternoon, just trying to figure out what I was going to do, whether I was going to have to cancel the play and try to find something else, because I just couldn't cast it properly. That was one thing—if I felt that a play wasn't cast right, I wasn't going to go ahead with it because I just wasn't going to take any substitutions. Anyway, I was standing there very disconsolately, and the door opened, and a young lady came in, and she wanted to know what the Little Theater was about. She said she had just arrived in Reno for a divorce, and she wanted something to do. She had a room right around the corner from the theater, and it intrigued her to see the signs out in front. So she had come in. I said, "Yes, I'm having tryouts for *Born Yesterday*."

She said, "Well, I've done some work in a little theater back in New Haven and in Westport, Connecticut, and I'd love to come to tryouts."

I said, "Well, you don't really have to come. Why don't you let me get you a book and you start reading now." I said, "Have you seen the play?"

She says, "I have—I have."

So she started reading, and she was just a natural for it. And Claire Emory gave a very, very successful interpretation of that particular part, besides being a very interesting person in her own right. She was a substitute reader, or translator, for Helen Keller, and was consequently a personal friend of Helen Keller's. And when Annie Sullivan was getting quite old, they used to try to find substitutes who could go with Helen to concerts and to plays, and so on, and the companion would spell all the words out in the palm of her hand in the dark. Claire gave us many interesting stories of her experiences with Helen Keller

and what a grand person she was. As I say, she knew her very well because she was just a young girl when she first met her. I often regretted having lost contact with her because she was an interesting person. Particularly, I thought about her just this last fall when the Little Theater did the story based on Helen Keller's life.

*Bell, Book, and Candle* [January, 1953] was one of our final productions on the old stage of the Little Theater, and in that we featured an Ellen Landau, who was the wife of a young lieutenant out at Stead Air Base. He had connections with a costumer in Hollywood, someone who worked for Paramount Studios. And as a result of their interest in the Little Theater, he volunteered to get us costumes sometime, if we wanted them, from Hollywood. I was rather skeptical because I'd had any number of people who've come in over the years and tried to impress us with their connections in Hollywood and how much they could do for us. And usually they amounted to zero.

So the time came when we were planning to do *The Heiress*. That was April of 1953. This play is from the Henry James story of *Washington Square*. It is a dandy drama, and we had an excellent cast, with Glen Judd playing the father, and Eve Loomis playing the daughter. Ann Young was in it, Leona Fowler, Blanche Clark, and a young man who came in from nowhere by the name of Cesidio Tessicini.

Since the play required the costumes of the period of about 1880, I thought, "Well, this is the time where I'm going to find out whether Lieutenant Landau is really going to be able to deliver on his promises." So I told him what the play was and what we wanted, and gave him all the dimensions of all the cast, and told him how many changes I needed, and so on. So he said, "I'll get on the telephone

and I'll line this all up." Well, he got on the telephone, and he came back and he said, "Don't worry. Everything's okay."

And then I waited and waited, and things didn't come. And finally I said, "Are you sure we're going to get these costumes in time for dress rehearsal?"

He said, "Oh, I'm sure I am." He said, "But I'll call my friend again." And so he came back the next night. He said, "I called him, and he said they're on their way."

And sure enough, they arrived, and they were the most beautiful costumes we ever had in a Little Theater production. And that was one time when someone's promises were carried through. And it was beautiful.

We did have an amusing incident that happened in this production. This Cesidio Tessicini, it turns out, was out here for a divorce. He was living with a woman who was intended to be his next wife. They had a small child, and lived in a cabin out on the road to Mount Rose. He was working up on Mount Rose [as a] part-time ski instructor and just general roustabout. He said he had been in numerous productions. I don't think he had too much experience, actually. But he was on his way to Hollywood to try to make his mark. He was a very handsome young man. He fit the part beautifully, and as I had no one else to put in in that particular role, I decided to take a chance with him.

He looked wonderful on stage, he did an excellent job, but he had one physical difficulty. He could not stop perspiring! I first noticed this during the dress rehearsal, that he was just a mass of perspiration, and I mean it just literally rolled off his face in huge drops! When he'd play opposite Eve, get anywhere near her, she'd just be soaking wet. I took him to every doctor friend that I knew personally, and they tried everything they could think of. They tried antihistamines, they

tried everything. They gave him shots, pills—you name it. But they never found anything that could check this terrific perspiration. I have since thought that he would have been a wonderful subject for some of these TV commercials [laughing], the “extra dry” kind, because we just couldn’t do anything with him. And it was fascinating! People who were sitting down in front, in the front rows were down there, could see this sweat just roll off his forehead and down his nose and drop with a splash onto the floor. So everywhere he went, he was followed by a trail of water [laughing]. It’s the only time I had that particular experience to solve.

Our final windup, I guess, in May of ’53, the last play on the old stage was *Lo and Behold!* And we had several new people in the cast. Esthermae Kneller [Wittenberg], Joyce Laxalt, Don Hitchcock, and Robert Debold were our oldtimers in it. We had a teacher by the name of Clifford Donley, and another one, Martie Young, who played principal roles. And Dr. Robert Broadbent played in that. He was newly arrived in Reno, was just starting up his practice, and had time to be in a play. But it wasn’t very long after that that immediately his practice grew so rapidly that he could no longer devote any time to Little Theater.



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## CHANGING TIMES AT THE LITTLE THEATER, 1953-1970

1953-'54 was the first season with the new stage, the new big stage. I might mention some of the things that we were blessed with as a result of getting that stage. We were able to move everything under one roof. We, of course, sacrificed the quonset hut, and in its place we'd put up the building, which was approximately fifty by fifty. When we finished, we were approximately, oh, between fifteen and twenty thousand dollars in debt. It ran over \$50,000, and we had some \$30,000 raised for it.

We had the big room downstairs, which we dubbed the Circlet Theater. That area had two restrooms, and it opened into the main building. Because of the solid brick construction of that back wall in the old building, we were unable to bring adequate heating facilities into that area because our furnace wasn't big enough to accommodate that additional space. We thought at the time that we would probably be able to add a secondary heating plant in a matter of a year or two. It's now some sixteen or seventeen years, and we still haven't been able to provide

adequate heat. So that section of the building is only heated in a fragmentary fashion. There's just enough heat to reduce the subarctic to Arctic temperatures, I guess you might say. It meant that we had to do everything under the sun when we used it in the wintertime for a performance. We had to turn all the heat off every place in the building, and there was one register that brought heat into that section. But it was impossible to provide the proper circulation. That's a problem that's still facing the present management of the theater. It was planned that we would have that downstairs area strictly for experimental theater. It was to be used for theater in-the-round.

So we started off to utilize the Circlet almost from the very beginning of that first season. We didn't get the Circlet, as it was called, really completed until well into the spring of 1964, I guess it was. We had a meeting of drama groups throughout northern California and the Bay area, and I can't think of the name of that council—Council of Community Theaters. They met in Reno in a convention, with meetings held



in our theater, which had been completed. We used the Circlet for our banquet, followed by entertainment provided by Beatrice Kay.

Among the people in attendance was Miss [Eleanor] McClatchy of the *Sacramento Bee*. And she was so entranced by the production of the show that Beatrice Kay put on—and Sylvan Green (of course, her husband at the time) accompanied her—that she had a special benefit performance of Beatrice Kay in Sacramento to help raise money for the Eaglet Theater in Sacramento.

We finally had to finish up the Circlet—since we had run out of money, we finished up the Circlet ourselves, as far as painting goes, and we had a member (his name was George Gates) who was a professional painter, and he got all the paint and organized the crew. And so we finished it up.

The lighting equipment we got for a couple of hundred dollars from the old Golden theater-restaurant, which was being remodeled. I think we bought them at that time from the Tomerlin brothers. We had all recessed lights, spots we put up into the ceiling. We hadn't any money for a switchboard, but we had a panel that was installed near a window in the old building. For our sound equipment, we installed speakers in the ceiling, with lines running out to the old building to a sort of makeshift control room so that we could use it for sound effects. Some of our leftover rheostats from the early days were also put in the small control room. So we had sort of a jerry-built type of lighting system.

The first two or three years we were really very inventive in our Circlet programs. We did productions with the players entirely surrounded by audience, we used the thrust type of stage with the audience on three sides, we used productions with the two different acting areas and the audience turned around

to face them. And then our most ambitious production—and I would say our most successful—was the original dramatization of Walter Van Tilburg Clark's *The Track of the Cat*. We did that with a continuous set that went around almost a hundred and eighty degrees. The audience was sitting on a diagonal so they could look in all these different directions.

George Bennett, who had been with us from I think his freshman year at the University, an amazingly talented young man, did the dramatization of *The Track of the Cat*. We sent it to Walter Clark, who was teaching, I believe—as I recall, in Montana at the time. He approved of the script, and he and his wife came down for our premiere performance. Afterward he said that he was very satisfied with what had been done with it, and he seemed to feel that it was a faithful recreation of the book. (We had talked a great deal about dramatizing his first great success, *The Oxbow Incident*. But something came up and we never did get around to doing it.)

That particular play was extremely taxing because it called for a number of outdoor scenes, which are pretty difficult to do in that type of staging, with the audience so close. We did all of the tracking scenes primarily with lights and in silhouette. For instance, when the leading character finally sees the cat on various occasions, and one of them finally leads to his death, we had a cyc arranged in one corner and trees done in silhouette. And the cat, itself, appeared on the screen as a shadow. The actor was, of course, in front of him, and he was lit. We just had this silhouette of the cat popping up from behind the rocks.

And surprisingly enough, it was quite effective. We had an organ accompaniment, music of Western folk songs. That was arranged by a young musician here by the name of Roberta McConnell. She was

acquainted at the time with a young concert pianist who was out in Reno for a divorce. He was from Israel. His name was David Bar-Ilan. Roberta got him interested in the theater, and so he agreed to give a concert as a fund-raising program to help us complete the things we wanted to put in our theater. We borrowed a grand piano, and he gave a recital to a packed audience. And then he repeated it again and gave another concert. He did this all on a volunteer basis, and we were extremely grateful for the opportunity to raise money. Also, he was interested because he found that the acoustics in our building were just about perfect for concerts of that nature.

Incidentally, he then left us, went back East, and he is still playing with symphony orchestras throughout the country. A year ago at this time, I just missed being in Washington, D. C., where I could have caught a concert in which he was the guest soloist for the Washington Symphony Orchestra. I certainly would have looked him up had I been there at the right time, because he was certainly a charming person, and he helped us a [laughing] great deal financially.

We had to do everything we could to try to get ourselves caught up financially as a result of the strain of putting that addition on. The Circlet series, bill of plays, was intended to help in that regard. Other plays that we did down there in Circlet were—let's see, we did *Hay Fever*, we did *The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker*, and we did a [Jean] Anouilh play. I can't think of the name of it. We did *The Taming of the Shrew*, and later *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

*Anne Frank* had one amusing incident, particularly on opening night, because the play called for several rooms, and the audience was seated right around the acting area, and the rooms represented the garret in which they were all self-imprisoned, we might

say, hiding out from the Gestapo. The play was written with many scenes, and the end of a scene or scene change was just indicated by a complete blackout. Everything had to work according to a count because we had no way of letting the operator in the other room know when everybody was ready for the lights to go up on the new scene. And there was a great deal of going to bed and getting up the next morning, that sort of thing. George Herman played Anne Frank's father. And in one of the many costume changes and scene changes, he got caught, literally, [laughing] with his pants down when he was in the process of getting out of bed and trying to get clothed in a hurry in the dark. That was one of the unplanned laughs [laughing] of the production. Something was wrong with our counting, so for subsequent performances, we gave the players a little more time by increasing the count.

It also was the first, the only time that I can recall in the history of the theater, in which one of our players was killed during the run of the show and we had to call off a performance. He was the young man from Stead who played one of the lead roles. And after a Sunday night performance, on his way home, he went off the highway and was killed. And the cast just didn't have the heart to rehearse anybody else in the play for the final weekend that we had planned. It was just too much of a blow for all of them. So we had an abbreviated run for *Anne Frank*. We also did some experimental work in the summertime.

But we found that it was very, very difficult to carry on a full program of plays in the Circlet, and also a full program of plays upstairs. We had neither the staff nor the people available. And somehow or other, we couldn't get the same turnout for casting. People being what they are, they are in plays to further their egos. And as such, they feel that

they want to be seen by the largest number of people available. And if they are going to be in a play that is catering to an audience of fifty or sixty, and considering that as a full house, they don't particularly care to devote their time to something with so little impact. And that is one of the real reasons why the Circler finally died out. It was a lack of material to work with. I feel it's one of the unfortunate developments in the theater because we were doing interesting experimental Work. But somehow or other, we didn't have enough good scripts or actors available at the time.

We also had a monumental problem in the sheer physical effort of clearing that Circler Theater and moving everything out into the old part of the basement of the old building, and then setting up all of these sets. In order to get proper sight lines, we had purchased many of the concrete forms that were used in constructing the building. They were made of heavy three-quarter-inch plywood on two-by-four frames, and they just stacked very beautifully, and we were able to stack them in tiers and arrange them whichever way we wished. We received a donation of some folding director-type chairs from Harold's Club, which we used as our seats for Circler productions. We still have some of those folding seats in storage at the theater.

We kept the Circler going for three or four years. The "sig" that we used to designate the Circler Theater was a circle, a circular sign that we had out in front on the Seventh Street entrance. We had a big street light there, which was given to us, an original gas street lamp of early San Francisco, prior to the earthquake. We had candles that we burned in the lamps on performance nights, trying to establish a tradition. Trouble is, the wind blew too much (laughing) on that side of the building. We had trouble keeping the candles burning through the performances.

It's one of the disappointments, as I look back on it, to think that the Circler wasn't able to continue. I wished that we might have possibly—we might have joined in with the University, which at that time did not have a theater building, and maybe they could have helped out a little in some way, or we could've put those facilities at their disposal.

We also had other problems in the Circler, and that is that our basement was the lowest spot in that neighborhood. And whenever there was a flood, a heavy rain, or a melting snowstorm, the water from that whole area backed up and flooded the Circler. In fact, it started our very first winter that we were in there. We had eight inches of water in there and had to get the fire department to come out and pump the water out of the place. We had a shutoff put in in the basement, but unfortunately it was a manual affair. And somebody (and it usually was I) had to remember, whenever there was a thunderstorm or heavy rain in the wintertime, that we had to get up there fast and turn off that sewer line to keep the water from backing up. A few years ago, we felt sufficiently flush to invest a couple or three hundred dollars in getting an automatic shutoff. Then, of course, the city came in with the proper storm drain system in the area, and that has solved our problem—at least, seems to have. But for a long time, we were having real problems in the Circler.

I believe it was in the fall of '53 that we planned to open with *Mr. Roberts*. We had originally planned that we were going to have a stage that would be fifty by fifty, and we were going to have a fly loft so that we could fly our scenery. We got the services of Monk Ferris, Lehman Ferris here, who was one of our greatest friends through the years (he'd had a theatrical background; he'd been a member of the local stagehands' union, and

he followed our activities with great interest), and he donated his services as an architect for that addition. I'll be forever grateful.

There were lots of problems involved in trying to add this building that would meet the fire code and safety specifications onto an old building code such as we had. Our plan was just to tear out our tiny stage in the original building and use that space for additional seats, and then cut a hole in the end of the building and use that as our proscenium arch. We had exits down in the front, left and right, and we utilized the areas above the exits for a sound booth on one side and for lighting on the other.

But we had to make so many changes in order to accommodate our budget. We had raised approximately \$30,000 that we'd saved over the years, and we soon realized that it wasn't goin' to be enough. So we changed our plans, then, eliminated the high loft, stage loft, and tried to make changes and modifications so that we could come up with something that was better than what we had, even though it wasn't the ideal that we had planned. We came up with a stage that was thirty feet deep with an additional twenty feet behind that for a shop area and workshop. That was entered by a tall, fourteen-foot sliding door, which made it possible for us, if we wanted to, to extend our sets back into that area. And finally, in our revival of *The Little Foxes*, I realized my ambition of having a set extend from the footlights back thirty feet, and then another additional twenty feet, into the shop. So we looked through three rooms in our set. That was just to demonstrate the versatility of our stage.

As I say, we had planned to open with *Mr. Roberts*, with a two-week run. The opening date was set. We got a good start on the building, but early in July, the carpenters went on strike. They picked a time when they had

just laid a part of the stage floor. The rest of it was open; the brick walls were up. But there wasn't anything that really could be done until that strike was settled. So the building had no work progressing on it for a period of six weeks. And we were getting closer and closer to target date for *Mr. Roberts*, when we'd have to start rehearsals and all. So finally, we did start rehearsals before we ever got the stage finished. And from then on, it was a real nip and tuck race to see if we could make it.

The demands of *Mr. Roberts* were great for an amateur group such as ours. So we knew that we were going to have to use a revolving stage. The new stage floor was planned so that it had the central acting area with traps, and we could pull out traps and go downstairs so that we could show the crew going below decks, and so on. Then we built a revolving stage that was twenty-four feet in diameter, placed the set on top of this, so that, actually, one half of this semicircle was the deck of the ship. Then it was built up above, so we had the rigging and so on showing. In the back, the other half was divided into two sections to represent ship's quarters. On those two quarter sections, we could change the scenery and the props to make them serve as the other different locations on board ship.

The whole thing required a tremendous amount of work, because in addition to just the normal requirements of getting a stage set ready, we had the additional problem of getting the stage completed, getting dressing room area, getting the lighting in, getting all the stage rigging, and so on. We had to put in a counterweight system for our lights (that was all we could afford to do at the time), and then we had to improvise in order to get the necessary lighting and sound equipment for the particular production of *Mr. Roberts*.

We had difficulty in that play right off the bat in trying to find an ideal person for Mr.

Roberts. I eventually was forced to bring in a professional actor from the Bay area, whom I had met at Lake Tahoe. Many people felt that our own people were better than he was. I tried to avoid bringing in somebody, but it just happened that there was nobody available to play that particular role.

We had a very successful run. I'd say that *Mr. Roberts* was the most successful production ever given in the Little Theater. It ran two weeks to practically packed houses every night, and it was a great way to raise money to pay that deficit that we had incurred in the building.

A number of amusing incidents happened in connection with *Mr. Roberts*. On the first Friday night, the play was just about to open. The audience had read all the advance publicity about the revolving stage which we were utilizing. And it *did* make a noise, rumbling, as it turned. And just about five minutes before curtain time, there was this tremendous roar in the building, and the whole thing shook. We got a very bad earthquake, an earthquake that cracked the foundation of our new addition. Everything backstage was swaying. But the curtains were closed, and the audience couldn't see all this movement backstage. They assumed, fortunately, that it was just the revolving stage being turned, and they didn't panic. But it threw everybody on stage into a panic.

And that was the night when we had one of our most embarrassing experiences with the goat. As you recall, in *Mr. Roberts*, there is a scene in which the sailors all come back aboard ship after shore leave, and one of them brings a goat that he has stolen.

The sailor came onstage with the goat, and there was a very affecting scene between Doc and Mr. Roberts, and the two of 'em are sitting on the deck. And all the sailors have come aboard; they've all gone downstage, and

they've all said, "Hi, Mr. Roberts, hi, Doc," and then they go below. And one of 'em comes in, and he's one of the latecomers coming in with the goat, and he starts to say, "Hi, Doc." Just then the goat stops and proceeds to relieve himself on the stage.

At first, there was a little gasp from the audience, and Mr. Roberts and Doc continued to talk and tried to cover over it. But the goat never stopped! And there was this phenomenal cascade of pellets that hit that hard [pounding on his desk—rap, rap, rap] stage floor, and they just bounced all over that thing. It was like hail, like a hailstorm. And it never stopped! And finally, the audience was so impressed, they just went into hysterics over the whole thing! It broke up our two members on stage, who just roared with laughter!

Finally the actor who played Mr. Roberts got up and yelled for some of the crew to come out and swab down the decks. And they did. They came out with push brooms (which we fortunately had backstage), and they had to sweep that whole stage off before we could continue. That scene got a wonderful mention [laughing] in the papers.

During this first season of productions in our new stage [1953-54], I believe we hit our highs and our lows. We had the most successful play of all time [*Mr. Roberts*], with the longest run, made the most money. And we also had one of our least successful from a financial standpoint, [*Late Love*].

Yes, that was the least successful, *Late Love*. It wasn't a good script to begin with, and the attendance was dreadful; I'll explain why later. But we gave plays in that first year with an eye to demonstrating how much we could do with a proper stage, so that every one of those plays called for a set that was a back breaker to get together. I was still at this time technical director and director at the



same time, and was also the chief builder. For instance, *The Country Girl* had half of our revolving stage from *Mr. Roberts*, so that we could switch scenes 'cause it had several scenes in it. *Street Scene* required people coming out of a basement apartment, and then it was two stories high, the front of a tenement building. We had to have all of this scaffolding built behind so people could be seen in the windows up above, and then also play on the first floor apartments. *Gigi* required multiple sets, elaborate costumes, and it was a real back breaker. The third—let's see. There was a play about Washington politics, *Affairs of State*.

We noticed our most terrific slump of the first season with *Affairs of State*. And we traced it to the event of TV in Reno. It came in in the fall—I think in November or so of that year, November or December. And there were only a few people who had sets at that time, but there was such a pressure on that by spring, there were enough people who had purchased sets and were enamored with TV that we lost our audiences. And we noticed, to our great disappointment, the following season, our ticket sale just dropped way off. We had a terrible time. Our plays conflicted with people's favorite TV programs. And it was unfortunate because we had counted so on the stimulating effect of having a big stage and being able to do all these ambitious productions.

[When we had] our first season on the new stage, with *Mister Roberts* and *The Country Girl*, *The Moon Is Blue* [December, 1953], we had in *The Moon Is Blue* a young man—another young man from Stead; his name was Roy Bolla. He was from San Francisco. He was really badly stagestruck, wanted to go into the theater, had a lot of talent. He won a talent contest out at Stead and went on a tour with the Air Force up to

various air bases up in Canada and up into the Arctic Circle. In these revues he did a standup comic routine. He played one of the principals in *The Moon Is Blue*. I had only a cast of four. At that time, that was considered to be a very blue play from the standpoint of the script. I look back on it now, and it's just pink tea in comparison to what I have recently seen on the stage.

*Gigi* [January, 1954] was one of our highlights. It was an excellent play, and we had a fine group of people who were willing to work hard and give us a very tightly knit production.

Eve Lambrecht was a new addition to us. She was an instructor out at Stewart Indian School. She was from the Bay area, a very enthusiastic supporter of the Little Theater. I had first seen her act in a production in Carson City that was given by a group that was attempting to start a community theater over there. And I saw Eve, and I was very impressed with her work, and was happy when she moved to Reno with her husband. Her roles in the theater included straight roles, comic roles; she played in *First Lady*, *Gigi*; she played in our first musical, she did a variety of things. Her son, Garth, was very interested in theater, and he has directed a number of productions in recent years. Eve died very suddenly in an aftermath of an operation.

Others in the cast of *Gigi* were Arthur "Art" Stedman, who was another airman from Stead, excellent actor. For the period of a couple of years or so that he was with us, he played a number of roles and was—I'm sorry to lose him. He eventually went back East, and as I understand, he never did get over the theater bug and is still trying in off-Broadway productions. He's married and is living a very precarious existence, although his father's an investment banker in Connecticut, and I guess he's been able to help Art keep on.



But he's never been able to make the grade professionally.

*Street Scene* [March, 1954] had one of the largest casts we've ever had. As you know, the set was the outside of a tenement in New York City, the east side, and on our new stage—we had a real construction job. We had a basement apartment and then two floors on top of that. We had other problems in connection with that show. We had a death in the cast, we had substitutions at the last minute, but somehow or other, they all pulled through. We had the entire Loomis family in that particular show, Mr. and Mrs. Frandsen Loomis, and their son Drew.

It was in this year that we began to notice sort of a decline in box office, as I mentioned earlier, due to the advent of TV in Reno in 1954.

We still, in our second season [1954-1955] with the new stage, did do some very fine shows. We had, for the first time, a full-time technical director. This was Bill James, who had been with us while he was attending the University of Nevada. He had gone on and gotten a master's degree in theater at San Jose State. He came back to us as our technical director, and was in charge of all our sets and costumes. I'm tryin' to think of some of the plays we did. *Rain* was one of them, which required gallons and gallons of water. Bill rigged up a very elaborate rain system so that we could have the tropical storms. And unfortunately, we almost lost the ceiling in the Circlet downstairs because the drainage wasn't what it might have been, and the water overflowed the drain system and got the floor wet, and it went down into the Circlet. We had water coming from all directions. But it did demonstrate the versatility of our stage.

[That season, 1954-1955 had opened with *My Three Angels*, and then *The Corn Is Green*,

*Personal Appearance* with Beatrice Kay, *Time out for Ginger*. *Rain* was in March, 1955.]

As I said, during the season of 1955, we had our first full-time director, Bill James. It was at this time that we sort of split off the technical work from the directing. I had handled both up to that point, but from then on, it was more than one person could cut. As I was then going into the insurance business, I didn't have time to devote to theater during the days. It really was too much, and we had reached the point, with this huge stage that we had acquired, where it was absolutely necessary to have additional technical help. Securing the proper technical assistance is now, and still is, has been, one of the problems of the theater because we really don't have the budget to hire a full-time man and pay him what he's worth, because the position calls for a highly skilled person with lots of imagination, lots of artistic ability, besides the ability to build with his hands, paint, and so on. We haven't always been as successful in getting the right people in that particular spot, and as a result, we've had to get by on a make-do basis, sometimes changing for a different play, sometimes we've had two and three in one season.

*The Corn Is Green* was one of our finest productions. We had beautiful sets for that. Dorothy Caffrey played the leading role. And as I recall, Bill James played—yes—played the young boy that she tutored and that she sent on. It was a recreation of the Emlyn Williams role. Dorothy also appeared in the leading role of the mother in *The Track of the Cat*.

[That year closed with *The Caine Mutiny Court Martial*.] We were able to utilize a number of people from Stead Air Force Base at that time. As a matter of fact, this period was really a wonderful one for the Little Theater because we had this pool of male talent, all of whom were looking for something to do. And

out of the many hundreds of servicemen out there, there was bound to be some excellent dramatic talent, and we did find some that added a great deal. There was Art Stedman, who was in *Gigi*. We also had a young man who helped us technically from Stead; he later went back to New York, and I think he is still working in off-Broadway theater. He sort of was bitten by the theater bug while he was in Reno, and he never got over it.

*The Came Mutiny Court Martial*, which we gave in June of '55, was one of our successful all-male productions. We had many people, well-known names from town. We had the attorney, John Bartlett, in this. Bill Friel was a newspaperman, Dr. Gorrell from the University, Roy Powers, who was in public relations work, Mark Curtis, I think I mentioned Roy Bolla. David Lunney was a young lieutenant out from Stead again. As you see, Stead Air Base was such a wonderful pool of manpower that we, too, in the theater, felt the effects of the eventual closing of Stead.

Let's see. We then went into the season of '55 and '56. Outstanding was *The Rain Maker*, which later was made into a musical, *110° in the Shade*. This featured Bill Friel, Eve Loomis in the lead, Roger Bissett, Joe Jackson, Bob Debold (they're all still people who are active in the community). Russ Byloff played one of his first acting roles. He was from Stead, extremely talented. He had been working primarily in a technical capacity. But this was his first job in a good acting role, and he did a fine job of it.

Then came a period of good plays. *King of Hearts*—oh, yes, that was the one and only production in which my son took a role on the main stage. He did do something in some of the children's productions. We had another young man from Stead by the name of Mel Goodbinder, who came to us. I think this was his first play. Curtis Farr played a good

character role. Dr. Wolf played the lead, Tosca Means played the other lead opposite him.

That was followed by *Dial M for Murder* [January, 1956], in which we had George Vargas, the attorney, in the lead. George was a wonderful actor, and I don't know how he ever found time to learn lines 'cause he was one of the busiest people, as you know. But he was quick; when he did have a chance to get a few minutes in, he could pick up those lines. And I never worried about him on stage because he never lost his cool. Blanche Clark played opposite him in *Dial M for Murder*, and did a very competent job. She was a good dramatic actress. We had Asher Wilson in this cast of this show. He was the new director of dramatics on the University campus, was there two or three years, was one of those instrumental in drawing up the plans for the present Church Fine Arts building.

*The Seven-Year Itch* [March, 1956] was another of those plays that we waited and waited and waited to give. And when we did get it, the person we wanted in the lead was unavailable. So we had to make changes, and we discovered a new person by the name of Frank McNally, who was a teacher at Reno High School. And he did a very good job. Also in the cast for this show was Christian Melz, who was the German teacher from the University. He gave us a delightful, small vignette characterization. This play was also considered to be rather risqué. It was repeated just a few years ago, and this, too, turned out to be rather bland in its repeat production because times, styles, attitudes involved change so rapidly.

*Anniversary Waltz* [September, 1956] was a successful comedy, was distinguished, I think, by the fact that it required a TV set to explode every night. I can't say too much else about the play. It was funny, good lines. But that TV set gave us problems.

We had a production of *Anastasia*, which featured Dorothy Caffrey in a very fine role of the grand duchess. And then we did a repeat production of *Arsenic and Old Lace*.

Then [came] our very elaborate production of *The Teahouse of the August Moon*. The play calls for a jeep to be on stage. And in the professional production, they had a mock-up of a jeep which looked like the real McCoy, but it was very light and portable. Well, you can't very well make a mock-up of a jeep for a limited number of performances, so we got a real jeep. And the next problem was getting it up onto our stage.

I measured and found that if we removed the railings from both sides of the stairway leading from the alley entrance, stage entrance, and took it up those stairs on planks, that we would just barely clear. We had to take the top of the jeep because we had an overhanging projection [gesturing] over the stairs, leaving us with one very critical area where we had to get by. We finally put another vehicle outside the west stage entrance because fortunately, we had the stage designed so we had a door on the west side. There was a big beam that went across the stage at a height of fourteen feet. We put a block and tackle up there, ran a cable from the jeep, which was over here [gesturing], up over this pulley, and then out the doorway onto the other jeep, which had a winch attachment on the front. So we turned that on, and we pulled the stage jeep up the stairway. We had a great deal of difficulty. We finally put a few holes in the plasterboard and tore off some of the projections. But we did get the jeep up there after we, of course, had drained all the gasoline and all the oil out of the thing, because it was something of a fire hazard inside the building. We pushed it on and off stage.

We had a beautiful set for that production. Russ Byloff was responsible for it. One of the

highlights of the show is the building of the teahouse in front of the audience. And he had worked that out very cleverly. He had screens coming in on slides and tracks. And some of it was lowered from above because we didn't have a full fly loft above our stage so that we could fly all of our scenery, and we had to make adjustments of various kinds.

*Teahouse* had an excellent cast. That was the play in which we discovered Oscar Fujii, who worked in a garage, and he did a wonderful job for us. A good cast of supporting players, including several children and a goat, a goat which, fortunately, behaved itself. It came in one scene on the hood of the jeep. We kept him around the theater for the whole week. But he had a penchant for eating everything that was in reach. We had trouble 'cause he would chew parts of the scenery, and he would chew costumes. And that fool thing—we had more trouble because we had to tether him outside. Fortunately, there was a ditch nearby, and there was grass for him to eat. But we had to have a keeper of the animals.

Let's see, others—Don Hitchcock was in that cast, Don Dondero, and we had a young man by the name of William Stone, who was a pre-med student from the University. He was a very husky fellow, and since he was a wrestler, we used him in the judo, the judo match, in the play. And he afterward went on. I understand he's a successful doctor now in Denver.

*Time Limit!* in 1957 was a play about the war in Korea. It was a spy production, primarily was an all-male cast. It had a number of—. It was a tough job technically. We had some interesting people in the cast—Rick Ahlswede, Binny May (Francis now). We had Bob Robertson, who was later the governor's first aide for a while, is now with the Indian Service in Washington; Murray

Dolan, another attorney; Bill Bond came to us from Stead; Tom Davis, I think, is the justice of the peace now in Carson City; Bob Gorrell; Jane Tieslau. And we had a young man whose name was Colonel Hester. And that, really, was the puzzler because his first name was Colonel. He was married to the daughter of an Army officer, and if that didn't lead to complications! His rank in the service, I think he'd gotten up to sergeant, or something. So he said it always threw them when they called him Sergeant Colonel [laughing]—Sergeant Colonel Hester. His father-in-law, I think, had some connection with the University.

*The Desk Set*, *The Great Sebastians* were routine comedies. *Speaking of Murder* was the play—did I mention of the little poodle that was locked in the safe? Well, I had almost forgotten about *Speaking of Murder* until I ran into Mary Jane Zunino, who was holding book for this particular play. It had to do with a man who was planning to do away with his wife, naturally. You know the situation. She was an heiress, and he was trying to get hold of her estate. He planned that he would do away with her by locking her in this big vault. You couldn't open the thing, and after a few days, she would be discovered, and it would look as if she had gotten in there accidentally and it had closed on her, or somebody had closed it, and they wouldn't be able to point the finger of suspicion on the husband.

Well, in the structure of the play, in order to demonstrate how lethal this particular vault was, the husband takes the wife's favorite little poodle and puts it in the vault, deliberately, to punish it. He hates it, and so he decides to kill it. So he puts it in the vault, slams the door, and goes through all the business of locking the combination so that there's no chance of opening it. The actor put the poodle in, slammed the door, twirled the dial. And after about a count of ten, out from around in

back of the stage and running onto the stage is this little poodle, just as happy as can be, and delighted at making another appearance. Mary Jane had neglected to pick up the poodle to hold it, fasten it by its leash backstage. He was obviously enamored with the theater, and he wanted to get back onto that stage.

It brought a tremendous roar from the audience! Needless to say, it destroyed the effect that was intended, because when the husband finally puts the wife and locks her in the safe, nobody [laughing] really felt that she was going to be in any danger.

Shortly after the opening of our new theater with the stage—incidentally, that added approximately fifty seats to our seating capacity in the auditorium, so that we were then up to 340 seats from 288. We could, if necessary, add seats, and we did for occasional performances add an additional ten. So we were playing, many times, with a maximum of 350 seats.

Because of the inroads of TV, we tried everything to see if we could recapture our audiences of the early '50's. We gave up our format of playing seven days a week, and cut out Mondays, and then Tuesdays, and then we gave two Sunday—we tried giving two Sunday performances again, and then hold over for one or two days the following week. And eventually, we wound up with what is our present formula of just playing strictly on weekends. These were expedients that came out of watching what other theaters were going through in the country. They were all having the same trouble. With the change in audience tastes and desires, patrons no longer wanted to go to the legitimate theater in the early part of the week, and so we just became weekend theaters in so many communities.

We developed the idea of the Golden Egg Awards in 1956, I think it was, as a gimmick to try to stimulate interest. Naturally, we

were extremely imitative of what was going on in the movie industry, but we were trying to avoid any real hurt feelings. So we gave Golden Eggs for the best actor and the best actress, and the best supporting actor and actress in each play of the season. We had the audiences vote at each play; it was their choice. We had the cooperation of the River Front restaurant here to support the awards. [That] had recently opened up, and the owner was interested, was a personal friend. He thought this was a good idea, a good way to tie in publicly, in the area of public relations, and also promote the Little Theater. So he sponsored the Golden Egg Awards, purchased the awards themselves, and he had them on display in his restaurant. At the end of the season, when the awards were finally announced, he gave a banquet for all of the Little Theater members. And everything was on the house, and the attendance, naturally, was excellent. It was a good gimmick. The idea of the Golden Egg was dreamed up by Roy Powers, who was active in the theater and is now active earning a living doing public relations for Harolds Club.

We kept the original format of the Golden Eggs for two or three years, and then, when the Farlattis left Reno (they were the owners of the River Front and sold out), we got, I think, the Holiday Hotel to sponsor it for one or two seasons. Then we had Gray-Reid's sponsor it. Then we made changes, and instead of giving so many Golden Eggs, we finally gave a Golden Egg for the best actor of the season, the best actress, best supporting actor, best supporting actress, and then four awards for the people who contributed the most in a technical capacity, contributing their bit to the success of the season. We tried to give these awards in the area of lighting, people who worked on lighting, people who worked backstage, or in the box office, or building

scenery or props, or just ushering—just being generally helpful. These were the service awards. The others, of course, were awards for performance on stage.

In order to be fair about it, we felt that it was necessary to have a board of judges who would have to see, of course, every play of the season. So at the end of each season, we would have a frantic search to find people who had seen all plays. We later smoothed things out by notifying our panel of judges ahead of time so they would be sure to see all of the plays and would be competent to judge them.

The whole idea was good, I guess, as an advertising gimmick. After the first two or three years, it was not properly exploited, was allowed to get a little bit shoddy in the way in which it was conducted. We didn't really utilize it to the fullest, and eventually, we started running out of people to whom we could give the awards. We had gotten through most of them. We had sort of an unwritten rule that we didn't want to repeat, that two people would get the reward in successive seasons. So we eventually did away with the Golden Egg sometime, it seems to me, in the mid-'60's. I'm not sure.

I think it was about 1967, or '66, that we gave up the Golden Egg, and we lost in this respect: the awards banquet was a wonderful highlight to tie off the season. And it provided an incentive for our members to come out. If they had only participated in one play, or had only seen three or four plays throughout the season, they were interested in finding out who did get the awards, and it brought them out. When we dropped the Golden Egg awards, we did lose dreadfully in our attendance at our final awards banquet, which serves to point up the fact that while we fundamentally were a group of people who were banded together primarily to give plays, we had a social side to our activities. And



many people came into the theater because of the social side of it. There were many people who were strangers in the community. They came in and they knew that if they came to the theater, participated in some way, helped out, if only to usher, they had an opportunity to meet people. And we had programs of activities throughout the year.

In some of the early years, we had a meeting once a month in which we had a program of some kind. Usually we tried to tie it in with theater. We had reviews of current plays, we had presentations of scenes from current productions, we had talks by people who visited the area (I can think of Elmer Rice, for instance, a playwright, for one), we had makeup demonstrations, and we tried to mix the social with the educational, as well.

Here again, this program was a casualty of changing times and attitudes of people. They just didn't have time for this sort of thing. There weren't enough nights in a week to accommodate one night of the month for the Little Theater. So that monthly program eventually dropped, and we stressed an opening get-together in which we announced our plans and the programs for the new season. Then we tried to have something around the middle of the year, and then for a few years we had a Mardi Gras around Valentine's or at the beginning of Lent, and then the final banquet at the end of the season.

These social activities were a strain on the people who were running the theater because the same group of people, you know, had to do everything. But they also served a great purpose in developing a hard core of unified members who were willing to go anywhere and do anything for the Little Theater. It was because of this loyalty that we were able to get them to do such volunteer jobs as redecorate the theater periodically, make drapes for the building, scrounge for donations, and all that.

Without that intense loyalty, we never could've made it because we had a very, very limited budget for a staff. About all we could afford to pay was a director, someone who worked in the box office, and a janitor. And with the advent of the new stage, it was necessary to have a technical director who had to be paid because he worked full time. So our budget had to be increased accordingly, and we got into a little financial difficulty in that we weren't able to break even for a few seasons, because we also had the debt to pay off for the remodeling project.

We were able to keep our full-time technical director, Bill James, only one year, and then he went on to Stanford to do graduate work. We brought in a young man from Oregon, Phil Sanders. He and his wife, Wilma, came to Reno from the University of Oregon theater department at Eugene, and he worked very, very hard. He was a hard worker, but he was not exactly an inspirational type worker, especially as an artist. He was a great man at building. He could build anything, but he needed guidance in the matter of design. He lasted one year, and then he and his wife moved back to Oregon to open a flower shop. The death of his father called him back.

Then we went into a period of catch-as-catch-can makeshift technical directors. One of the first we picked up was Russ Byloff, who was a young airman from Stead. He was a natural artist, had absolutely no training in theater, but he had a great sense of design and also a good sense of construction. I worked with him, and he turned out some of the finest sets we've ever had on the stage. The one, I think, that I look back on as the finest was *Inherit the Wind*, which had a raked stage, and incorporated the town in Tennessee and the courtroom in the foreground on the forepart of the stage. It was a beautiful job. I think that was [March], '58.



Boy, that was one of the best shows we ever did. And we found one of our finest mature actors in Dr. [Charles] Coleman, who was a veterinarian here. We used him in a minor role a couple of seasons prior to that. And he just seemed a natural to be playing in the Clarence Darrow role. For the player in the role of William Jennings Bryan, we picked a doctor who had moved to Reno whose name was William Bryan. And he claimed to be a nephew, a grandnephew, of William Jennings Bryan.

Dr. Bryan cut a wide swathe of publicity and notoriety across the local community. He had a great flair for getting his name into the paper, to the great distress and agony of the medical profession. I recall that the first time he tried out for a play, he wore a mink bow tie, which set him out as one apart from the rest of the tryees. The next time he appeared with twin guns and holsters, and they were loaded, which caused strenuous objection on my part and insistence that he thereby disarm himself immediately before I would go on with the tryout period. He was just a little bit this side of being completely mad, as far as I was concerned. But he did some fine work on stage. He appeared opposite Blythe in *The Solid Gold Cadillac*, for one thing. And as I say, he appeared as Bryan in *Inherit the Wind*, and gave a *very* convincing performance. But he was a real trial, so difficult to work with. I recall his medical ethics left something to be desired, and I think they were very distressing to the local medical group. He later became involved in a bit of scandalous activity in Sparks when he was running for a position on the Sparks city council.

He moved, eventually, to Hollywood, where he found his niche. He specialized in hypnosis. Later he developed a college of hypnosis, and he gave a course, and then awarded a diploma, or certificate of

completion—all at a good fee, I might add. He traveled all around the country and even abroad, carrying on these seminars in hypnosis. At the same time, he opened up an office in Hollywood and practiced hypnosis and accumulated quite a reputation. He was called back to New Jersey and testified in the Boston Strangler case. He also testified in another lurid murder trial that involved a young couple out of Florida. He got good headlines, but he didn't necessarily lead to or prove who the guilty party was. I saw him just a few years ago on a talk show that was carried on by Joe Pyne. And I was amazed, after a period of ten years of having lost sight of him, to see him just as theatrical as ever on TV.

Maybe I've given Dr. Bryan a little too much space in this account, but I did want to bring out the fact that he and Dr. Coleman, the veterinarian, the most unlikely people to be appearing in a play together, were so successful in the production that they gave. It was shortly after that that Dr. Coleman discovered he had cancer, and he died within the year, a very long, agonizing, lonely death. He was a great loss, not only to the theater, but to the entire community. He was such a kind person. I first met him as he was the vet for our own dog.

Let's see. I think I've told about some of the unusual things that happened in connection with *Inherit the Wind*. That was a story of the dramatization of the Scopes trial. That's one of my highlights over the years. I think we did a better job in that than we've done in the great majority of plays.

We had an animal in that play, too, the monkey, of course. And that monkey bit one of the cast members (his name was Bill Dubord) so many times in performances and rehearsals that we didn't know what to do about it. It was pretty hard to substitute a dead monkey [laughing], a stuffed monkey,

so we had to go through with it, and he was equal to the occasion. He got through all of the necessary performances.

It was in the late '50's that we gave our first attempt at a musical. It was *The Boy Friend* [November, 1958] and was a spoof on the musical of the '20's, and featured the Charleston and the raga for the Charleston. We had a nice bunch of young players who could sing, and also, could dance. It was a very successful production.

We had a very amusing situation in connection with that show. We always had people who came in from out of town, usually for the obvious reason of getting a divorce, who came to the theater to find something to do and pass their time away. We had a lady who, I'd say, was in her mid-forties, who came to the theater. She was from New York City, and she wanted to work backstage. She did practically everything that we could think of, even to sweeping the sidewalk outside the building, and doing some of the janitor work, and helping with costumes, and so on. She was just the greatest worker there was. And she also pitched in to help in the making of the costumes. The costumes were supposed to be those worn at a Mardi Gras by the young people in the cast. So they had clowns and a harlequin and a variety of the typical fancy-dress ball type of costumes. And she was just enamored with the work on these costumes. And she just worked like a beaver, and helped the players dress, and so on.

In order to accommodate the demands of the cast, we had a dress rehearsal slated for—it was Halloween, and our dress rehearsal was slated for four or five o'clock in the afternoon, to start then, because some of the people had to be through by nine o'clock that night. So we had everybody come to the theater early. They got there, and one of the first discoveries made was that one of the principal characters,

a young man, had no costume. And it was a costume that required tights and fancy top. We went through that building high and low and could find no sign of it. So there was nothing else to do. We started to improvise a costume, and we got the rehearsal going.

In the middle of the first act, I got a telephone call from a friend informing me that there was someone downtown, parading up and down in front of the Golden Hotel (at that time it was on Center Street) in a costume. It was a woman, middle-aged, making strange remarks to everybody and yelling. So I got in my car and dashed down, and sure enough, it was our friend. She had dropped out of sight the last two days of rehearsal. We didn't see any sign of her. And apparently, she had gotten into the theater, stolen this costume, and was wearing it downtown, and just having a high old time. She was really off her trolley, completely. We didn't know what to do with her because we were very much afraid that she might commit suicide because she just went from the heights to the depths. She became deeply despondent when we had to take the costume away from her.

I picked her up, took her up to the theater and got her back into another set of clothes. We found out that she had been sleeping in the Episcopal church, in a back room. Somehow or other, she had been put out of her room, some rooming house, and so she had wandered over to the church, and she had slept there two nights. Since she was wandering the streets, I tried to get her—I couldn't get her committed anywhere where I could be sure somebody would take care of her. Finally, I got hold of Dr. Tillim, and he took her down to the Nevada State Hospital and watched her. I finally found out the address of her husband (who was still her husband) back in New York, and I sent a telegram and asked if he couldn't do something about taking care of her. I think

he, himself, came out and got her and took her back home again, because she had just completely flipped while she was out here.

But that certainly was some way to start off our [laughing] run of *The Boy Friend*! I've never forgotten that. What a Halloween celebration that was!

Let's see. We did *The Matchmaker* in '58, which later came back as the musical version of *Hello, Dolly*. That, too, featured Eve Loomis in the leading role. We had Bob Gorrell in the cast, Juanita Elcano, Bill Bond, Blythe Bulmer, Ruth Scott—a very good cast for that.

In '58-'59 we did *Visit to a Small Planet*. In the cast we had Guy Shipler, who has since become known locally as a political commentator on TV. This was a satire written by Gore Vidal, the author of *Myra Breckenridge*. It was a considerably better play than *Myra Breckenridge* was a book. Had a little casting difficulty with that play. Bob Ware came in at this time. He was helping us technically in that production. He later became technical director for a season, too.

We did *The Tunnel of Love* in March of '59, and I rewrote the ending of the play because everyone seemed to feel that our audiences, as conservative as they were, would not accept the ending as planned by the author. It required quite a bit of tinkering, and I was afraid that I might get into trouble. But it came off all right. We felt that the original ending was not sound, and it destroyed the characterization. It wasn't in keeping with the characters as they had been set earlier. Afterwards, I saw the movie, and they'd changed it just the same way we had changed it. So I felt justified that it was all right to tamper with the script. (We were pretty careful to observe the rules and play our plays as they had been written and were intended to be played.)

*Death of a Salesman* in April of '59 was one of our most successful productions from

an artistic point of view. We had an excellent cast, who gave a very sensitive interpretation of the show, but it was a *real* box office dud. It just did not draw at all. We had Dr. Coleman in the leading role with Jane Tieslau as his wife. We introduced Mike Taugher and Cork Proctor, who has since become famous in the local nightclub circuit around here. They played the sons. We had Bob Ware and Blanche Clark, Norman Romwall (known locally in minor roles), and Mickey McBride. Mickey was active. Also, I can't remember, but it seems to me at this time, Mickey was beginning to take on some of the technical chores, helping in set construction.

I was trying to think of some of the other people who played with us during these times. Dr. [Clare] Wolf came to us. I think the first play he appeared with us was in *Bells Books and Candle*. He had recently come to Reno, and he was an O.B.-gyn specialist, and one of his patients was Mrs. George [Joie] Vargas. We had a bit of difficulty with the scheduling of *Bell, Book, and Candle* because we were so afraid that the performance nights would conflict with the time Mrs. Vargas would choose to give birth to her first child. As it happened, she picked opening night. And Dr. Wolf ran from the stage—I mean, we got these periodic phone calls all through that performance—he ran from the stage directly to Washoe Medical Center [laughing] and delivered the child. That was cutting it *almost* a little bit too close. He appeared in a number of other productions, and then his practice got so large that he was unable to devote time to it.

Blanche Clark was originally with us way back in the early days of the theater. Then she moved away from Reno; her husband's job took her to Elko, and then she came back again. And every time she came back to Reno, she was extremely active with the theater and played many, many principal roles. She also

was involved in one of the most horrendous afternoons we had in the theater. *Death of a Salesman* [April, 1959], which featured in the principal role Dr. Coleman again, and Blanche appeared in the scene as the other woman in the hotel room. At that time, we were still giving two performances on Sunday, on the final Sunday. Something happened, however, to Blanche's memory, and she forgot that there was a matinee that Sunday afternoon. So she didn't show up. When the time came in the second act for her scene, we discovered that Blanche had not arrived. In fact, I discovered it some time ahead of that, and I phoned everywhere, I think, in the city of Reno, trying to find her. Unfortunately, we never did get her in time for that scene. And the play didn't quite make too much sense that afternoon for our audiences because we had left out rather a critical scene.

We had difficulty in changing the pattern of days of the work we used for performances. When we eliminated the Sunday afternoon matinee, we decided that we would eliminate all Sunday performances. It was just too much work, and people were objecting. We were getting some grumbling. So we said we'll do away with it. We announced it, and we immediately got a kickback, which, in a way, was gratifying, to know that it meant so much to our audiences that they were insistent that we have at least one Sunday performance. So we compromised and gave our seven-thirty curtain Sunday night performance, which made it possible for people to get home earlier. Because we did have people who came in from out of town, and when we gave up the matinee, then we felt that we should slate a performance a little earlier than the eight-thirty curtain.

The only trouble is, it took about ten years to educate our audiences to the fact that on Sunday night, the curtain went up at seven-thirty, not eight-thirty. We also had trouble

educating our cast to the fact that they had to get there one hour earlier on Sundays than they did on the other nights. In fact, we are still trying to educate them to that change. And we've had some mighty close calls about people who have forgotten and have fallen asleep, or have gone off to dinner, and discovered that when their memory finally was jogged by something or other, or when we called them, or we sent out a runner after them, trying to track them down around town. These are some of the perils that you run into with people, actors, who are not being paid and consequently don't feel that sense of responsibility.

*The White Sheep of the Family* [May, 1959] had Sam Houghton, Dr. N. B. Joseph, Gene Hart, Duane Morris, and Ann Warren [Smith] in principal roles. Duane Morris was a young man who came to us through Stead again; he was a young lieutenant out here. He was married to an Idaho girl, I believe. And he was stagestruck. He had a good singing voice, was a fairly good actor, and he was determined that he was going to go on and make his mark in professional theater. He later played in *Guys and Dolls* in October of '59; he played Sky Masterson. He was one of those doubly cast in that principal role. When he left Reno, he went back to New York, and I heard that he was trying to make the grade professionally. A few years later, I was in New York, and I got tickets to see a TV broadcast. It was in Radio City, and one of the ushers who showed us to our place was Duane Morris. He was not too anxious to see me. He had divorced his wife. He thought possibly I would hold it against him, but I didn't. I was just tickled to death to see him, and I realized how tough it had been for him. And I was pleased that he was still in New York.

About four years ago, there was a production of *Hello, Dolly* playing in Vegas

at one of the theater-restaurants, in one of the casino-hotels. And playing one of the principal roles was Duane Morris. So he did finally make it in a company. I went backstage afterwards and met him and congratulated him on his work. And he told me that he was staying with the company—I don't know, twelve or fourteen weeks, and then he was going on tour with another company of the same show. He felt that he really had cracked the ice and he was going to go somewhere in the professional theater. I've lost track of him. I don't know whether he's done anything since then.

*Guys and Dolls* was our twenty-fifth anniversary production. And we planned to make it something special. We started on it in the spring and worked on it off and on during the summer because it was our opening production. The first play of every season is always a difficult one because you've broken stride over the summer. Many people are not back from vacations, or they're going on vacations, and they are just not in the fall routine yet. So they don't like to be in the first play. But we wanted to kick off this twenty-fifth season with something special, so *Guys and Dolls* was selected.

We had Sylvan Green, who was the former husband of Beatrice Kay, an old-time pro in musical theater in New York, in charge of the musical direction. Bob Ware took over preliminary directing chores during the summer because I just refused to be involved in a play during the summer months. They did quite a bit of work. We had a young man from Stead again who had some experience in professional dancing. He took the choreography of the show, and the designing of costumes and props for all of the dance numbers, of which there were many. This was really an ambitious play.

It was an excellent—of course, it has an excellent script as well as fine music, which

is still good. But we ran into many problems because of the many people required. The more personalities you get into a production, the more problems you're going to uncover. We had a number of weirdos who came in through the dance director, men who were supposed to have some dancing ability. We discovered that we had some people who were on pot, and things were going on during the summer that were giving my assistant director a good deal of trouble.

I'd finally received an anonymous warning that there was a girl in the cast in a minor role that I had better get rid of, that she was being watched by the local narcotic squad. I don't know the truth of the rumor; I couldn't follow it up, but I knew that there was something happening that was trouble, so I had to get rid of her and give her no explanation as to why I was doing it, 'cause I didn't really have a legitimate argument. I couldn't tell her why it was done, and I had to cook up some excuse. Of course, she had a few friends, and so that, naturally, produced a certain amount of division in the cast, and they decided they would leave with her.

That meant replacements. We had double cast some of the leads. Consequently, there was a certain rivalry between these people who were double cast, as to who was going to play certain nights. It was, really, quite an emotional experience.

We had, in addition, the technical problem of about ten different sets, all of them quite elaborate, requiring quick changes. The sets were designed by Craig Sheppard of the University and constructed by anybody that we could lasso and drag into the theater. Mickey McBride was our principal technical man at this time, in charge of building sets. He was also our principal dancer. He had had the rare combination of being a football player in high school and a ballet dancer, if you can



imagine that. And he did equally well in both. Also had a fairly passable singing voice, too.

The large cast of *Guys and Dolls* finally pulled together, and it was really a smash show. We could have played that thing for much longer than we did, but we just had the rest of the season to think about. I look back on it very fondly as one of the best things we did, and it was worth all of the horrible birth pangs that we went through in getting that production on the boards.

The double casting was always a problem, as far as personalities go, and it always put me on the spot as to who's going to play a certain night. But it always paid off because somewhere or other, one or two members of the cast would be sick, or they'd have a sore throat, or something, so that we always had somebody to step in. And it's very difficult to put in a substitute in a musical show, because in addition to learning lines, you have to learn the music and learn the dances—everything that goes with it. So it did pay off at that time to double cast.

We followed up with revivals, new plays, and then in 1960, we attempted another ambitious show, *Auntie Mame*. Bob Ware was the technical director, and I think he worked all summer, devising plans and discarding them for the many, many sets that were required by the show, and the costumes that were necessary.

This, too, was one of those plays that had built-in publicity values. When we advertised tryouts for *Auntie Mame*, we had the greatest assortment of people you've ever seen coming to the theater, feeling that *they were Auntie Mame*: I might not have realized it, but this was a role that the author had this tryee in mind for all the time the story was developing. And the tryees ranged in age from people eighteen to almost eighty, it seemed to me, because they were—we had the greatest

turnout. I had difficulty making a decision, and I finally took someone who was literally an unknown. Her name was Anita Schechter. And as I recall, she was the wife of a traveling salesman here in town. So she was only with us a couple of years, and her husband was transferred even before our production was completed. She stayed behind in order to finish the play and then joined him in Texas.

It was one of those plays that if you could just get it running, it couldn't help but be successful, because it had, as I said, built-in publicity, and the situations and the dialogue, everything, were great.

We had a university student—let's see if I can remember. Larry Hutchings played the young boy. He was well in his twenties. I think he was either a sophomore or junior in college, but very small. And he was very convincing in that role of the principal, the boy, as a youngster. He has since gone on, gotten his law degree and practices law down in the Sacramento Valley, I think at Stockton. We had a number of university people who were in that play, as well as some of our regulars.

I was trying to think of some of the situations that occurred in that show. I think it went pretty well, although the first run-through, which was on a Monday night, prior to opening, was the first time we tried to run through with all of the sets and the costumes. And it was the most colossal shambles I have ever seen! Nothing worked, as far as the scene changes go, 'cause we were using what is known as jackknife stages. They got hung up, and nothing would turn out the way it was intended. The costumes looked terrible in some cases, so we had to redo a number of them, had to make changes in the sets, and so on. And if I hadn't been in the business for as many years as I had prior to that, I might have been encouraged to go out of the theater and



never return again after seeing that Monday night performance. But it pulled together, and it was listed as an artistic as well as a box office success.

We played *The Mouse Trap*, which is an Agatha Christie story, later that same season. That particular play ran for— I don't know, fifteen or twenty years in London. I think it is still playing over there. It didn't go that long in Reno, believe me.. We found that it was just a little bit thin as a mystery play.

*All the King's Men* was one of the significant dramas that I could point out in recent years. We had a nice cast. We discovered a new person by the name of Mike Schon playing the role of—it was based on Huey Long's life. It had good dramatic values, and all in all, I was pleased with the many types that we were able to get together.

We did a revival of *Light Up the Sky*, which was a play by Moss Hart that had to do with some of his theatrical experiences. And it was successful the first time, and equally successful on the revival.

The following years—let's see, '60. We got into the '60's, we had trial—somehow the trial plays are successful. *The Andersonville Trial* was based on *Andersonville*, the book, had to do only with the trial. We had some good types that we assembled, did lots of work on the costumes, getting the proper Civil War atmosphere into the show.

Let's see, *Send Me No Flowers* brought back to the stage after many, many years of absence Mildred Fisher and introduced George Herman from the University in a principal role, a different, straight role, rather than a character part. Rick Ahlswede also played in that, and Joe Elliott, who was doing public relations work and doing some radio work, had a nice singing voice, and last fall was ordained as an Episcopal minister over here in Trinity Episcopal Church. He went

on and studied for the ministry after his appearances in amateur theater.

*Johnny Belinda* was a bit on the dramatic side, had to do with the story of a deaf and dumb girl up in—is it the Gaspé Peninsula? Here again, we were able to utilize the talents of a person who had never been on the stage before. He was Bob Cavakis, who is on the police force. Somebody told me that he knew sign language. I got hold of him originally in order to help us in the sign language. He became interested in the play. We had a part, a principal role that hadn't been cast, and I asked him if he'd be interested in trying it, and he said, "Sure, I'll try anything." So he rearranged his schedule and played the role and did a very fine job. It was really a heartwarming experience to see what he did. And, of course, it made good copy, as far as publicity is concerned.

Let's see. Others in that cast were Anndale or "Andy" Fleming, who has been with us over the years in numerous productions, including plays that we gave in the Circlet Theater. Her mother also had been in some shows. She went to Hollywood, tried to get in the movie business, eventually came back, and I think she's living in Carson City now.

The next musical we did, I think, was in '62. (Doesn't seem possible.) It was *Take Me Along*, which was based on Eugene O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness*, yes. The name just left me then. The principal roles were played by Joe Elliott, Mike Schon, Madge Tillim, and Wally Fullerton, Nina Garrett. We double cast in this particular show, too. Frank Chartier was in it; Rollan Melton from the Reno Newspapers played one of the roles. Sylvan Green handled the musical end of it. It had nice music. It was not sensational, but it had a nice atmosphere of nostalgia of the period of the turn of the century.

*Write Me a Murder* was more or less a routine murder story. We've had Sort of an

unwritten rule that we've always tried to give a melodrama or a mystery play, or a murder story of some kind in the course of the season. I usually picked the month of January because it was always sort of a low period, and that type of play seemed to draw well. So that was our production in '63, *Write Me a Murder*.

And that was followed by *The Devil's Advocate*, which was an ambitious production based on a very popular story. It required crowds, many set changes, many costumes, all of which were designed and many of them were constructed by Norma McCann, who, by this time, had made quite a name for herself designing our costumes. Her clerical costumes were particularly excellent. She had done a lot of research, and she found substitute materials for the real McCoy and things with the right colors and all, because it had everybody from popes and cardinals and bishops and archbishops, and so on, in the play.

Bob Cavakis played again in that show. [Consults notes] I see we got him back for a few productions. He did not like comedies; he did not like any "shows." But anything that was heavy, he was game for.

We did *The Thurber Carnival*, which was a series of blackouts, or sketches, with music. We used recorded music for this particular production. It was fairly successful. Most of our audiences didn't quite go for the Thurber humor when translated on the stage. And it was done with a cast of, I think, eight people.

The following year, we made a change in policy and used different directors. I assigned different plays to different directors. We opened with *Take Hers She's Mine* with Dan Dollarhide in the lead. This was the first production he appeared in. This was in October of '63. He came to us from the northwest, and he helped in all manner of technical capacities. He acted, and he directed

a number of shows in the years that followed. *Take Hers She's Mine* was sort of a routine family comedy play with lots of sets. There were a lot of young people in it, and it was a good opener.

*Desire under the Elms*, which followed in November of '63, was almost catastrophic. It opened on the weekend of the assassination of President Kennedy. And the whole experience, sort of—everybody was in such a stunned state that nobody wanted to go. The production was consequently "down," we might say. It was difficult to do, to carry off. It's a little bit dated now, unless you have a superb cast, when you go to see the particular interpretation that they give to a show.

We had as our melodrama that year *A Shot in the Dark*, which was a translation from the French comedy, with Dan Dollarhide directing. Outstanding were David Hagen, an attorney, and Meda Crane, Frank Chartier.

Our first attempt at Shaw was *Major Barbara*, which we gave in February and March of '64. We had some good people from the University? David Phoenix, David Hettich, Bill Cowan, Dan Dollarhide in a character role, Pat Lewis, and Bob Robertson was the director. Kathy Smith was a University student who was in a number of shows. She subsequently married and moved back East. She came to us by way of Children's Theater. When she was in grammar school—elementary school, rather, and right through school and the University, she appeared in various theater productions.

That year, we did *Come Blow Your Horn*, which was our first Neil Simon production. Every time we advertised a Neil Simon play, we could be fairly sure it was going to be a box office success. This was no exception, even though Neil Simon as a name was not too well known to Reno audiences. It featured Russ Byloff, Lorraine Dollarhide,

Euell Labhard, Vivian Chartier, and Jean Henderson, who was another person that I have to mention because she has been with us over the years in numerous productions. She first started off when her husband was going to the University, and she was working to help put him through school. She was working as a dealer in Harolds Club, had three children. She's subsequently divorced her first husband, remarried, done a fine job of raising her children, and has contributed a lot to the Little Theater, both on stage and backstage and out front in all capacities.

That season of '64 wound up with the production of *East Lynne*, which we attempted to do in the style, the mood, the costumes of the period. It was quite successful, directed by Dan Dollarhide. And we had a new generation of Loomises in this. We had Del Loomis and her younger brother, Chris, in the cast.

In 1964, incidentally, *The Best Man* was the first opening play of a season that I missed in all the years except for my five years in the service, the occasion being the fact that I had to go back as a representative of the State Insurance Association to a national convention, and it came just at this particular time, when *The Best Man* opened. So my interests were kind of divided until I got the word that *The Best Man* had opened and that it was successful.

It was directed by Meda Crane, and Dan Dollarhide served as technical director. It was a political play. Funny, I can't remember the author now. But it had to do with the backstage workings and election of a presidential candidate. It was quite successful, featured Bob Robertson in the principal role as one of the presidential candidates, and I think David Warner Hagen played the other candidate.

That was followed by *Enter Laughing*, which was a modern comedy, with a certain

amount of theatrical background. Also, Jewish family life was the heart of it. It introduced Alan Arkin to Broadway (he has since, of course, climbed to the very top in motion pictures), and was largely biographical. It was quite successful, despite the fact that it posed problems in that it was so demanding with the many sets. We stylized the production, using more or less cartoon style sets. Dan Dollarhide directed that, and also acted as technical director.

*Calculated Risk* in January of '65 was our mystery melodrama. It was directed by Blythe Bulmer. This was among her first attempts at direction. Dan Dollarhide acted as technical director, was responsible for the sets. *Calculated Risk* had to do with the activities of the board of directors in a corporation in which they were maneuvering for power. It was not terribly successful, largely due to the inability of the principal characters to learn lines. So there was a great deal of prompting from offstage, some long, awkward, unexplained pauses. I will name no names, but [laughing] it was our perennial lead who always had trouble learning lines over the years, and once again was involved in a situation that was over his head.

This play was followed by *Pool's Paradise*, which was an English farce, a strictly situation farce that was sort of a successor to *See How They Run*. *See How They Run*, early, oh, about seven or eight years previously, was by an English playwright. And when we read the play at tryouts, I remember feeling that *See How They Run* was without a doubt one of the worst scripts I had ever encountered. And I seriously thought and debated changing at the last minute and giving something else. But I couldn't find anything, and so I decided we would go ahead with it. And it was the greatest sleeper we ever figured because it played beautifully. It was wild and real farcical.

We had a good cast. So we followed it up with *Pool's Paradise* by the same author. Though it wasn't as strong a play, it was, nevertheless, highly successful. It featured—let's see, Judy Garwood, Pat Lewis, Dave Hettich, Joyce Bantz, Bob Errecarte in the principal roles, and had Euell Labhard and Gene Hart in the good supporting roles.

*A Man for All Seasons*, in April, was noteworthy in that it brought back, after an absence of, oh, almost fifteen years, the talents of Dave Goldwater, who had returned to Reno. And he played the principal role of Sir Thomas More. Costuming was particularly effective, and that, too, was handled by Norma McCann. We had a very effective, sunpie set. The play went pretty much without a hitch, technically. The principal roles were taken by Dave Hagen, Ralf Kuehnert, Dan Dollarhide, Gene Hart, Euell Labhard, Jane Tieslau as Mrs. More, and Del Street (who had been Del Loomis) as her daughter. Also, John Morrison from the University was another faculty member whose talents we enlisted in this show.

[Consults notes] I notice that the activities of Broadway West are mentioned at this point. Broadway West was an offshoot of Little Theater musical comedies. It really drew largely on the work of Sylvan Green, who wanted to be more active in musicals and thought that they should be doing more than the one a year that the Little Theater seemed to have scheduled on its program. He organized some of the principals of previous Little Theater musicals, and they went on their own. It was a disaster financially. I didn't see any of the productions, and I understand that many of them were disasters artistically. The whole thing collapsed of its own weight, primarily because there was no one to handle the direction of it. The principal director was Mike Schon, who also tried to play in the

shows. The results, as I say, were not very satisfactory. And the whole thing eventually collapsed after two or three performances. *Oklahoma* and *South Pacific* were their two principal productions, and they met with mixed results, shall we say.

*Mary, Mary* was by Jean Kerr. This was another play that we had waited for many years to give because it had a tremendous box office appeal when it was given on Broadway. The principal roles were played by Jean Henderson, Alan Crawford, and Bill Meyer. Kathy Smith and Norman Snow played the supporting roles. It was a tight, small cast with excellent dialogue. Dan Dollarhide directed it, and it was a very effective closer for the season of '64-'65.

We opened '65 and '66 with *Nobody Loves an Albatross*. And under familiar names, we had David Hagen, Phyllis Kane, Mills Baldwin, Gene Hart, Nonnie Robertson, and we had Norma Washington, who was a black teacher in the schools, and she did a fine job for us. Dan Dollarhide directed this one, and Hal Ewing was stage manager.

In the summer of '65, we were able to continue making some definite improvements in the theater, largely through the efforts of David Goldwater. We had a donation of the red carpet which is still in the theater, in the lobby and down the aisles. We repainted the lobby and the auditorium, largely with—well, it was *all* volunteer help. And we received a donation at this time of drapes from the South Shore Room of Harrah's Lake Tahoe. Our own people made a new front curtain and drapes to cover the exits down front. At this time, we changed our color scheme, and that's when we painted the projections on either side of the stage, painted them the charcoal black. And in fact, the donation of the curtain and the carpet is what triggered a change in our color scheme, which continued

until the opera group painted our lobby two summers ago in that rather horrible yellow-gold, or ochre shade.

I might add at this time that the opportunities to change or to improve the facilities of the theater were, for the most part, dependent upon unusual windfalls that came unexpectedly. For instance, our lighting equipment was improved as a result of acquiring the switchboard from the old Riverside theater-restaurant, and much of its lighting equipment. The Riverside, back in the early '60's, was going through another one of its changes of ownership. And the new owners had determined they would no longer have stage shows as had been given in the past, so they gave us an opportunity to buy the lighting equipment (it was all pretty ancient) and the switchboards that had been constructed in part by the various technical men who had worked there. We had to remove the equipment from the attic of the theater-restaurant (which was no mean feat, believe me), and then had to move them to the theater, and then we contracted to have somebody put it all back together again and rewire our stage to take care of it.

We had also acquired scenery from a production of *Suzie Wong*. It was a professional production which came into the Riverside and played there for a matter of a couple of weeks, and the company went broke and disbanded at the Riverside. So we had an Opportunity to pick up all of their scenery. It was professionally made, we had quite a windfall in flats and props, and lots of Oriental paraphernalia, some of which we utilized in subsequent productions, and others we still have stored away. We had many flats that had been cut down in order to fit the Riverside, and so we had to put splints on the frames and try to get them back to original size.

From time to time, we acquired donations from the old Golden when it was converted to—let's see, they had stage shows there and had a casino, theater-restaurant. When they converted that room strictly to casino, we were able to pick up a lot of the lighting equipment, which was subsequently installed in the Circlet downstairs. Everything is more or less a catch-as-catch-can proposition.

We benefited by donations and by scrounging on our part when we found houses that were being dismantled. We usually went out and managed to scrape up various pieces of architectural value. We got a lot of our '90's stuff, trim from doorways and fireplaces, and that sort of thing, most of which have long since disappeared, although there are a few of them that have stood over the years with their transformation and reappearance in numerous guises.

When the State Building was dismantled, I wanted something from it that we could keep as a souvenir of our early days over there. Dan Dollarhide and I went down, and for a fifth of whiskey to one of the foremen, we were able to emerge with the panic bars from the doors. And we had them installed in the theater, and that's what's there on the front. The side panic bars from the auditorium came from the old movie house at Stead, when it was originally dismantled in the late '40's. There are some various locks and things that came from the State Building that we have installed in different parts of the theater.

Oh, it was also at this time that we had a contribution from Harolds Club for our sound system. We had not had a proper sound system installed (we hadn't been able to afford it, for one thing), and we utilized the space that was over the right front exit from the auditorium. We put a stairway up in there, and we had a control room with sound, and then connected that by telephone to the box



office and to the light booth across the way on the opposite side of the auditorium. We had the benefit of contributions here, again, from Harolds Club. We were able to buy some new equipment, and so we have a pretty good sound system in the theater—that is, when we keep it up as best we can.

We received a donation from Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Orvis a number of years ago (1954) of the Hammond organ, which was used in the Circler production of *The Track of the Cat*. It worked so successfully, and Mr. Orvis was so intrigued by the effectiveness of the organ that he bought it from Roberta McConnell, who was the organist and owned the instrument and donated it to the theater. We kept it for, oh, approximately eight or nine years and then turned it in on the present grand piano, which we own, and which we have worked over, refinished. The need for a piano became apparent when we started going into musicals, and we required at least one piano, for every musical we attempted. So that was the reason for our trading in the organ.

Let's see, in '66, we did *The Deadly Game* as our suspense show. We did that in November, and had a very small, compact cast. It was more of a psychological play than anything else, and Dave Hettich stepped in at the last minute and played one of the principal roles.

One of our most successful musicals was given in January of '66, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. This was the happy combination of a compact-sized cast, three sets, fairly simple costumes to construct, and catchy music, easy staging. We had an excellent cast which included Gene Hart, Euell Labhard, Ruth Scott, Arnold Gibbs, Jan Johnson, Jim Marlin, Frances Parra. And we had the services of the choreographer from Harrah's, who choreographed all of the dances and the ensemble numbers. That helped considerably

in staging. *A Funny Thing* played longer than our usual musicals. We had the services of Verlita (Conner now) on one of the pianos, and on the other piano, Martin Dickstein. Is he still at the University? I don't think he's recovered from it, really.

It's a funny thing, but I really sort on draw a blank on the productions that followed *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* because they were beginning to be turned out there almost like machines, and we had different directors involved, so I was not in on the full five or six weeks of each production. I handled the casting of each play, and then I usually would plan the production, check the progress of the set, and then go in for the last week or the last ten days and work on the final assembling, putting together all of the technical elements of the shows.

One of our most ambitious musicals which came right in this period, and I think it was in 1967, followed *A Funny Thing*, was the musical based on big business. What was the name of that? We opened the season with it. Dan Dollarhide was in charge of the technical side of it, and it was a very, very strenuous show technically because it had so many scenes. It had the same composer as *Guys and Dolls*. Isn't that funny? Well, it'll come to me. It'll pop into my mind. But that required dance routines that were quite complicated, and it was so difficult technically, and our resources seemed rather limited. It was not as smooth as it might've been in the technical side, although it was a pretty good crowd pleaser. We used lots of people. And it was very colorful.

For the record, I will say that the musical, the title that I was trying to remember, was *How to Succeed in Busyness without Really Trying*. At least temporarily, it was the last of the big Broadway-type musicals that we



attempted. After that, we decided that we would recognize our limitations in size and in staff, and so on, and give only the smaller type of musical which we felt we could handle best. Also, because when we got into the Broadway type musical, we were inviting a direct comparison with extravaganzas that were put on by the local clubs. And the theater-restaurants around here were using stars from Broadway and using Broadway material, and you just don't show up and compare too favorably. So that was another reason for deciding to pull back.

I get into trouble when I start thinking about some of the other plays that we've done. We got away from the high powered Broadway musical because of the difficulty we encountered in this one. So we made a switch the following year and went to the small musical and did *The Amorous Flea*, which is an adaptation of Moliere's *A School for Wives*.

Back in '66—let's see, there were three plays, *Dear Me*, *the Sky Is Falling*, which was a Jewish family-type play by—let's see, it featured Eve Loomis, and it was written by—she was the star of a radio serial (that) featured the Jewish mother—Gertrude Berg, that's right. Hardy McNew was in the cast, Judy Morrison, Elsie Manning, Vivian Chartier. It was directed by Susan Gratton.

And that was followed by *Never Too Late*, which had been a Broadway hit of two or three seasons previous. It featured Jane Tieslau and Euell Labhard in the leads, with Joanne Garfinkle and Mills Baldwin and Pete Looney in supporting roles. Bill Cowan was the director of that production. In that cast was Pete Looney and (eventually to be his wife) Pat Ostrander. They subsequently left Reno, went back to New York and studied for two years at the Neighborhood Playhouse and then tried their hand at professional TV

work. They did get some work and are still back there. Pat has appeared in a couple of nationally televised commercials.

The closer for that season was *The Absence of a Cello*, which was directed by Dan Dollarhide, and in the principal roles were Marilyn Stock, Neil MacLean, Jean Henderson, and Blythe Bulmer, and David Hagen. That was a modern high comedy, moderately successful.

As I mentioned, the '66-67 season opened with *How to Succeed in Business* and was followed by *The Subject Was Roses*, which was the Pulitzer prize-winning play featuring a cast of three people. It was directed by Susan Gratton and had Robert Gorrell, Jane Tieslau, and David Hettich in the three roles.

We followed that with *Any Wednesday*, which was another popular comedy, depended almost entirely on situation dialogue, rather than characterization. It had been an extremely popular play on Broadway. It was directed by Garth Lambrecht, and the four characters were David Hagen, Sheryl Sutter, Mike Wright, and Suzanne Christian. It was a type of play which was extremely popular in the mid-'60's. And as far as the Little Theater box office was concerned, there weren't enough plays of that kind that were written.

That was followed by our mystery spot in February, *The Unexpected Guest*, directed by Bill Cowan, with Kim Allen, Jeanette Eshelman, Sue Gratton, Mills Baldwin, Allura Ruiz in principal roles, and the less we say about that play, the kinder we will be.

Then we followed that with a revival of *Life with Father*, this time with Robert Harvey (English professor from the University), and Joyce Laxalt came out of retirement after many years and played the role of "Mother." In the roles of the children were some second generation Little Theater players in Chris

Loomis and Just Loomis. Vivian Chartier, Anna Murphy Papez were in it, and Dave Hettich was associated with me in directing that play.

And we concluded with *Barefoot in the Park* [May, 1967], another Neil Simon production, I believe, with Pat Looney, Pete Looney, Blythe Bulmer, Bob Errecarte in the leading roles. Jim Murphy and Frank Chartier supported. And that was directed by Garth Lambrecht.

The next season, '67 and '68, opened with *Generation*. This was a fairly popular comedy on Broadway. It was directed by Garth Lambrecht. It was moderately successful. It was just another comedy, you might say.

And then that was followed with our revival of *You Can't Take It with You* with Blythe Bulmer and Randall Ross playing their original roles. New people in the cast were Arnold Gibbs, Hal Ewing. Madge Tillim had been a player from many previous productions, and Rene Smith, George Herman, and George Hicks all had prominent roles. This was quite a successful revival and proved that Kaufman's comedies stood the test of time pretty well.

*The Amorous Flea* [January, 1968) was our musical for that season. And this featured Rhea Stone, who returned to the Little Theater stage after an absence of some fifteen or twenty years. He came back and was working with one of the local radio stations, I believe, and immediately became active in theater. We had two people from the University, David McMurray, who was assistant dean of men, and his wife, Sue Ellen McMurray, both of whom had very fine voices and had previous experience in Oregon, where they played leading roles. George Herman, Francis Reed, and Mike Thompson, who is a graduate of the University of Nevada drama department,

also played in it. The director was Dan Dollarhide. Verlita Connor was the musical director.

This first production of *The Amorous Flea* was very successful. Being based on a classic, the Moliere comedy, and having very attractive music, it was rather a delight to the eye, as well as to the ear. We had very fine, expensive costumes that were designed for the show. Norma McCann, I think, was in charge of the designing.

And it was just at this time that we were able to get a little financial help when we received a contribution from the Arts Council. This was a federal project in which a sum of money was divided up among the states and was distributed for various art projects. Now it's official title is the Nevada Council on the Arts. There was, at first, an attempt to secure support from the state legislature. The party (a man from Las Vegas—his name escapes me now) who was responsible for organizing it in the state was doing so on a federal grant, and his approach to the legislature was rather fatal. And as a result, he succeeded in scuttling the whole program, as far as support from the state is concerned. So everything has had to be done on a voluntary basis. We have volunteers doing all kinds of work, and we have to scratch in order to get enough funds to support the organization itself. (We hope to make a plea to the legislature this year, to see if they may have changed their minds and can possibly help out a bit.) But they did succeed in having the existence of the Nevada State Council on the Arts established and recognized by the legislature, and the governor was empowered to appoint a council made up, I believe, of some twenty-two or twenty-three members, which, in turn, would select an executive board who would run the council and administer the funds which were to be appropriated by congress and distributed

to the fifty states. I was appointed a member of the council representing drama, and eventually was elected to the executive board.

One of the first projects was this production, this touring production of *The Amorous Flea*. And it came up very suddenly in the summer of '67 when I was asked by Craig Sheppard, who was one of the principal people involved in this Arts Council, in its formative stages, he asked me if—. There were some \$18,000 in funds available; could we find some use for part of it? So we decided that we would match approximately \$5,000, something like that. This was our opportunity to make a tour and spread the word about the Council on the Arts in the outlying areas.

In order to make this go, we needed the support of all of our legislators, and we felt that as many communities as we could reach, in some way or other—either through art or dance or ballet or legitimate theater, we would then make our influence felt so that the legislators in Carson would know what we were talking about, or what was being talked about when something came up that was related to the Council on the Arts.

But this particular grant came to us just when we needed it most because we were going through a period where the box office was slumping. We got a grant to enable us to take the plays out of town. So we took *The Amorous Flea* to Lovelock, to Winnemucca, to Fallon, and to Yerington. And we took a complete production, just as we staged it in the theater, with the full set. The set was designed for the Reno production with an eye to its portability. And the whole thing knocked down.

We sent a truck ahead with the set in the morning, on a Friday morning, and then we arrived in Lovelock (that was after most people were working during the day), and we set the show up and gave it in the high school

auditorium that night, and then knocked the set down after the production, and took it the next day to Winnemucca, set it up again, at that time, in the old Nixon Opera House. That was really a chore because we had to start with an old stage that had some of the old-time equipment in it that had originally been installed in the place. We had to remove most of it and put our own scenery and put in all our own lighting. We worked Saturday afternoon and all Saturday night until late and all Sunday morning, and then we gave a matinee Sunday afternoon because we had a conflict in dates on Saturday night. We gave a late Sunday afternoon performance and then had dinner, struck everything, packed up, came into Reno, took it out again the following weekend to Fallon, and then to Yerington. It was lots of fun. It was the first time we did it.

The second year, the amount appropriated was about \$38,000, I think. And this had to be distributed throughout the state. Then, the year following that, there was a grant of I think around \$50,000. I think this year (I think this is the fourth year that it is in existence), the grant to Nevada was approximately \$75,000. Various art groups throughout the state submitted their plans early in the spring for the succeeding year, and these various budgets were pawed over by the executive committee. There was an attempt to set up a priority and an effort made to make the work of the Council on the Arts felt in every area of the state, every geographical area. Sometimes it had to be done only through a visual art 'cause practically every community had some amateur artists, and in some cities, towns, they were more organized and more productive than in others.

We followed up the second year with a Shakespearean production of *Twelfth Night*. And that was done in Winnemucca, Fallon,

Yerington, and Hawthorne. We had a conflict of dates. We were unable to get booked in Lovelock, and that was the reason we bypassed it that year, and we took Hawthorne in its place. The production in Hawthorne was unusual in that we got down there and found that the stage in which we were supposed to be giving our show was occupied with a set from a school production. We were unable to take it down, and so the crew set up our set right on the floor of the auditorium, right in front of the stage. And they played it more or less in an area staging with overhead lighting that was in the auditorium. And it was moderately successful. The people adjusted to this change in staging. Our set was very flexible so that it could be used in that way, and we had rather colorful costumes, although Shakespeare itself was not as popular with the out-of-towners as was our first musical.

Last year, we took another musical, and it was *The Fantasticks*. This was rather a moderately expensive production because it required a four-piece orchestra, including a harp and a harpist, who happened to be a union musician and we had to pay union rates, which raised the cost of the production. But I can't conceive of the play ever being done without that harp because it was so important in the production. The settings were simplified, stylized. And while the play had been seen at least once by many of our audiences, it still had a great drawing power. And I thought that we had quite an effective production. I can't remember who directed it now. John Downey [directed]. The musical director was the wife of a visiting professor from Finland. She was the daughter of a concert pianist, and her only previous appearance in America had been about ten years previously, or fifteen years previously, when she had accompanied her father on a concert tour of the United States. (It's terrible that I can't remember her name, but we can

fill that in later.) This was also under the sponsorship of the Council of the Arts and helped us again in balancing our budget.

Three summers ago, we were helped a little bit in being able to rent our auditorium in the summer to the local opera group for the presentation of light operas. And that has gone through three summers. The requirements, or, rather the limitations of our theater rather hampered the opera group. But in a sense, this was more than compensated for, I think, by the fact that they were playing in an auditorium with good acoustics, an intimate atmosphere, which added, I think, to the appeal of the operas. The fact that no performance is ever really a sellout and that there were empty seats would seem to indicate that the size of the auditorium was right at that time. They removed about six or seven rows of seats in order to make room for the large orchestra.

In the season of '68 and '69, we opened with a Neil Simon comedy and closed with a Neil Simon comedy. The opener was *The Odd Couple*, which featured Dave Hettich and George Hicks in the leading roles, and the play was directed by Dan Dollarhide. We used as a set a set that was originally built, custom built, for a production of *The Odd Couple* that was given in Harrah's, in their showroom. That production featured Dana Andrews; he was the principal character from a TV series, and another movie actor played the lead. And this was the first attempt to bring in legitimate theater into Reno after many, many years. It had the effect on the Little Theater of shutting out the availability of Broadway productions for a little while. When they were picked up for a professional production, it just delayed that much longer our chance of getting a nonprofessional release. *The Odd Couple* had been on our list of plays that we wanted to do for several years, and we had to wait until it was

presented here, with a professional group, before we were able to get the nonprofessional rights.

*The Torch Bearers* was revived in November of '68, again with Rhea Stone, Eve Loomis, and Blythe Bulmer [in] principal roles. The director was Dan Dollarhide. This was definite satire on the little theater movement in communities. Somehow or other, over the years, it has lost its bite, lost its pertinence. And while it still had an hilarious second act, which showed many things that could happen backstage in an amateur production, the script itself was fundamentally weak and more or less collapses in the third act. And we were not immune to that collapse.

We followed in January, 1969 with the musical of *The Mikado*, of which the director was Ted Puffer, from the music department of the University of Nevada. He had most of his principal people who were enrolled in his opera training course, with a few of the nonsinging roles (filled by) a few of the people from the Little Theater. It was a successful production, both musically and dramatically, and it was our first attempt at Gilbert and Sullivan at the Little Theater.

*Wait until Dark* was the mystery play of that season. It was by the author of *Dial M for Murder*. It was really a well-plotted story and got over very well. The principal roles were played by Dan Dollarhide and Chuck Harper, Jean Peterson, and Mel Anderson. It was directed by David Hagen.

*Twelfth Night* followed that in April of '69, directed by David Hettich. And this play was the production slated to tour under the sponsorship of the Nevada Council on the Arts. Primarily, the leading roles were taken by faculty and graduate students from the University, some undergraduates, also. The principal roles were taken by Rene Smith, Susan Gratton Nichols, Julia Waller, Dean Davis, and Mike Aitken, George Herman. It

was quite a successful staging of *Twelfth Night*, and did fairly well on tour, although we did not get the box office response that we had had the previous year.

The final play of that season was *The Star-Spangled Girl*, which was a Neil Simon lesser effort. It featured three players, Chuck Manley, David R. Slemmons from the University, and Linda Lowry. It was directed by Dan Dollarhide. The play itself was very, very thin and could not be classed among our greater efforts.

We then opened the season of '69 and '70 with *Don't Drink the Water*, which was written by Woody Allen, was an improbable farce, typical of the Woody Allen type of humor. It was moderately successful, with, shall we say, just an adequate cast. It was directed by Euell Labhard.

It was followed in November, '69 by *A Cry of Players*, which was based on the early life of Shakespeare. It had certain modern overtones. It reflected some of the change in emphasis and technique of modern dramatists. Its language was a little too strong for local consumption. We received some rather stern criticism from some of our patrons on some of the scenes from the play. They felt that they were much too graphic, the language was too hard on the ears, and some people felt that they just had all they could do to sit there. Some others of our patrons said that it was fine, we were moving in the right direction, we finally were giving plays which were something more than warmed-over Broadway, and that there was something in them that you could sink your teeth into. It was moderately successful, directed by Susan Nichols.

Then our revival for the year was *The Philadelphia Story*, which featured Sheryl Adams, Bill O'Mara, Tom Wilson III, Robin Richards, Loy Barnett in the principal roles. It was directed by David Hagen. It was one of



the most popular plays of that season, from a box office standpoint.

It was followed by a production of *The Innocents*, which was a dramatization of Henry James' *Turn of the Screw*. Technically, this was an excellent production. It had a very fine set, and all of the sound and lighting effects were extremely impressive. They were essential to the success of the play, and it was directed with a great deal of loving care by Garth Lambrecht, who spent many weeks on the show. The leading role was played by a young lady from the University; her name was Asa Wall. She was recently from Sweden, had acted in nonprofessional productions in Sweden.

Following it was *The Fantasticks*, which was the musical of the year, and was taken on tour under the auspices of the council on the Arts. In the cast were David Hettich, Roni Gallion, Bill Hindley, Gerry Ferrell, John Gascue, Del de la Pena, John Downey, Budd Morton. The musical portion of the play was handled by Marja Binham. This play had been given by the University on two occasions, I believe. We were the third producing group to give it locally. But despite the fact, it still was popular and drew well, maybe because of its simplicity or the familiarity of so many people with the music involved. And it was also successful on the tour.

In the spring of 1970, we lost two of our members who had worked so long, faithfully in the theater: Leona Powler, who was one of the early members from Our very first season, and Dorothy Caffrey, who came into the theater in the early '50's and stayed with us up until the time of her death. Ill health prevented her from taking any active roles during the last three or four years of her life, but she more than made up for it in her work in promoting the season ticket campaigns of the theater.

The final play of the season of 1970 was *Love in E Flat*. It was strictly a situation comedy. It was directed by Bill Cowan. It had a tricky two-level set, which was put up and designed by John Downey. It was successful for a play of its type. I think it was the third play by that particular author, whose name escapes me at the moment. I'll have to look that one up and fill that in later.

With the end of the season, '69 and '70, I decided that I would finally turn the running of the theater over to other hands, since I had been it for so many years. And it was decided that the work of production would be divided between John Downey and David Hettich for the season of '70 and '71 John Downey had been technical director at the University of Nevada for two previous years, and he was interested in making a change. David Hettich had a leave during the first semester of the college year, so he had time to devote to the organizational and the planning activities of the theater.

Plays which are scheduled for this year are Harvey, which is the revival; *The Miracle Worker*; *Hay Fever*, a Noel Coward comedy; *Once Upon A Mattress*, the musical; and for the touring play under the Council of the Arts, *The Price*, by Arthur Miller; and hopefully *Plaza Suite* by Neil Simon as the concluding comedy of the season.





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## SPECIAL ASPECTS OF THE RENO LITTLE THEATER OPERATION

### FINANCE

We've always had, as our goal, to be self-supporting. And it was necessary from time to time for us to raise the price of the season tickets because all of our activities, our budget for the year was based on the number of season tickets that we sold—in other words, the amount of money that we had to work on. Anything that we made on the box office, we always figured that that was so much to the good because we could never be sure of what was going to happen that would affect the box office. So we couldn't count on it definitely. But anything that we did take in was that much to the good. The season ticket drive was always the most strenuous activity of the theater. The most successful chairmen we have had have been people like Mrs. Walter Tobin (I think I've mentioned her before), and Mrs. Bruce Thompson. These people really put in many, many hours, and then, later on, Dorothy Caffrey did a tremendous job. In fact, for many years, she was the mainstay of the season ticket drive. She sold more

than anybody else. She worked all summer long. And it took someone who would be willing to pound and make people sell tickets, because despite what we had dreamed of in the early days, that once we got started for three or four years the whole thing would go on its own power, we found that such was not the case, that we had to sell ourselves every season. And the people would enjoy coming, they would buy season tickets, but they still, the following year, would not buy on their own. They had to be approached and urged to buy a season ticket, though there was a time in our "glorious" days in the '40's when we devised the idea of selling a season ticket by giving our patrons the same seat in the house for the same night the same week of every production. And the beginning of each season, we would throw all of these permanent reservations open for grabs on a first come, first served basis. I can recall that it was usually on a Saturday morning that we would have a line stretching way out from the theater, of people waiting to come in and try to get the seats of their choice for that season.

Those days seem to have disappeared, and we have suffered the fate of the movie theaters, which have found during the last few years, that they have many, many empty seats. It takes a rare play or a rare movie to get people out to where they're willing to wait in order to get a seat.

For the financing of the Little Theater in our first year, I had personally bought the first equipment we had, and everything was done, then, on credit—our printing and our rentals, and so on. We depended entirely on the box office receipts for each play. We did manage to break even, and I think at the end of the first year, we had a few hundred dollars that we could carry over into the next year. With each play, we tried to add something to our permanent equipment. It was either in costumes or in sets, which we built and rebuilt. So much was donated. We rarely ever bought anything for a set outside of paint and a minimum of lumber. All of the furniture was borrowed from private homes, or else from furniture stores. All the moving, which was necessitated by having to go from our studio workshop over to the State Building, was all done by the use of volunteer trucking, trucks that we were only able to get on Sundays, which made the moving such a colossal job 'cause Sunday is not the ideal day to get people out to do volunteer work of that kind.

The very first season demonstrated to us, though, how difficult it was to try to have a separate individual sale of tickets for each production, and brought home the necessity of trying to put things on a season ticket basis, with a consequent saving for those who wanted to gamble on the whole season. But before we could do that, we had to make sure that we could demonstrate that we were actually able to give the plays that we promised and that people wouldn't be advancing five dollars and not getting their

five plays. So that's why we had to limp along that very first year with individual sales. Then when we reorganized in the summer between our first and second seasons, we made definite plans and made our announcements of our season ticket sale and got organized, got volunteers who would work in teams and get out and sell tickets. So we had only one season ticket sale to worry about.

We carried over the same practice later on, the fifth or sixth season, when we finally got out a program in which the ads were the same throughout the season. In other words, we sold an ad on the basis of five or six showings in a season, and then all we did was change the cast copy for each presentation. That meant that we had one solicitation of the ad, one collection problem. The printing contract was based on an initial run of the entire programs for the full season. I think it ran as high as 12,000, and a few seasons we had 14,000 programs printed. And then a part of them were utilized with each play with a change of copy on certain pages. But the ads, of course, were permanent. That cut down the amount of work that we had.

We managed to make a little bit through rentals. We rented costumes. In the very early years, we acquired the costume supply from the old Fuller Costume Company, which was up on North Virginia Street, in what later became the Knights of Pythias building. Ben Fuller was an old-time theater man who ran a school of ballroom dancing back in the 'teens. And he also rented, had a supply of costumes, because in those days, the costume party was quite popular. So when he finally was forced out of business, he gave us all of those costumes. I don't know whether he actually gave them to us, or whether we paid for them, paid fifty dollars, or something of the sort. But we still have remnants of those first costumes in our wardrobe department.

We were able to enlarge our wardrobe when we finally moved into the building on North Sierra Street. There was a women's clothing store that went out of business, and they donated all of their cabinets to us, and we cut them so we could get them in the door and down the basement and put them back together again. And that formed the physical wardrobe facilities for our costumes. We have long since outgrown them, and many of our costumes, of course, that we used to have a tight control on. But somehow or other, it's been difficult to get volunteers to work on something like costumes. There isn't enough glamour in connection with it to attract them. And as a result, we have lost many things, or they've been borrowed and never returned. People have broken into the wardrobe section and made off with things. So it's been hard to hang onto props and costumes that we have acquired.

I think the high point over the years, as far as income goes, in one year we had receipts of close to \$25,000, and we operated on that. In fact, we saved money toward our building program when our income was in the twenties [in the \$20,000 bracket]. It has since dropped. It's, oh, around seventeen or eighteen thousand a year, something like that. I'm not sure what it will take to boost it back up again. I guess it's going to take a general shot in the arm of the theater in general, from the professional point of view as well as the nonprofessional. As I say, the chief means of financing the plays was by the sale of life memberships which still goes on. We've had occasional donations, rental of costumes, rental of the building itself. We have rented it for everything from Bible schools to various kinds of athletic activities. Churches have met there, we've had concerts, numerous recitals, just everything you can think of, any means to try to increase our income.

We started years ago trying to get a tax exemption for the Little Theater since we were a community activity. In order to qualify for certain tax benefits, we had to set up the constitution and bylaws so that the building was held in trust for the county of Washoe. In the event that the corporation itself ever folded, it would automatically revert to the county, and they would then take title to the building. This, as I say, was necessitated in order to comply with the Internal Revenue requirements for a tax exemption, and also, and primarily, in an attempt to get a tax exemption, real taxes, through the state legislature. But we have never been able to get the proper exemption that I feel that we should have, because it seems rather odd that an organization such as ours, which is largely voluntary and has such a time making ends meet, has to pay taxes on the building, the things that they acquire. We have an exemption that the first \$5,000 of value is exempt from taxes. But it puts a crimp in the budget when you have to put out between \$1,300 and \$1,500 a year for taxes. And then we have the problem of upkeep, which has been going on. We've had to put on new roofs. Fortunately, the furnace has held up. We've had the problem of paving sidewalks and streets out in front. We've had assessments for that. And it's been a constant struggle to make ends meet. I guess maybe that's part of the challenge of the thing. At least when I left last year, I felt that we were in a position where we didn't have any onerous debt hanging over our heads any longer, and that we were almost paying our own way, and that we would pay our own way when we once got the last balance paid off at the bank. However, I'm not sure just what the future will hold for the theater as far as finances go.

There has been talk over the years of various ways to try to become, in a sense, tax

supported, such as the Community Theater in Palo Alto, which was always looked upon as the ideal community theater setup in that a minute fraction of the tax rate is allocated to the community theater. And that takes care and guarantees the expenses of the theater. But with anything of that nature, you give up a certain freedom of activity when you do start to take out of the city treasury.

We have thought, in the past, of tying in with the University, and, in fact, there were some times when the University gave its productions at the Little Theater. I taught at the University in a couple of summer sessions back in the late '40's, and I had courses in play production. The facilities at the University were nil. They hadn't improved in the period of thirty-five or forty years. So I gave the productions at the Little Theater. And there was another season, I believe, when University productions were given at the theater. There was talk during those years of possibly joining forces and of letting the University help in the financial maintenance of the Reno Little Theater. But with the acquisition of a theater building of their own on campus, and an attempt to put in a full drama major, there was no reason for a close associ—well, we have a close association, but there's no reason for any financial relationship. And we have kept more or less independent, although we do have a fine working agreement whereby the University uses some of our materials and we use some of theirs. It prevents a duplication. Their budget, however, is much larger than ours, and they are able to acquire more elaborate equipment than anything we are able to get together.

Our season tickets have remained constant over a period of six or eight years at ten dollars. Some of our greatest arguments on the board of directors have been just on the wisdom of keeping the ceiling on our season

ticket price. We have bowed to the inevitable and increased our individual admission charges, not on the season ticket. For instance, it's gone up to—r think we charge two dollars or three dollars for a musical. That is not excessive, I know, because you have to pay the same price, if not more, Just to go to a motion picture. And we always feel that people have been trained to pay more for a legitimate, live theater production than for a motion picture. Somehow or other, this is a product of our generation, I guess. The price, of course, of admissions in professional productions has zoomed, and we are caught in this bind of trying to keep the price of the Little Theater within the range of the below average pocketbook because we don't want to make this thing only limited to people in an upper economic level because some of our best talent has come from people who are not in the highest earning brackets.

One of our charms, or the appeal of the Little Theater in its first days, when we started in the Depression years, was the fact that it didn't cost anything to be active in the Little Theater. It just took a minimum. We tried to supply everything for the people, even their makeup, so that if they were dead broke, they could still come to the theater and have a good time, which is something you can't say about every hobby nowadays. We also tried through our Sunday matinees; we would throw them open to people who could not afford to pay anything. We would sort of get the word around that anybody could come. Then I think we put a price of fifty cents on that Sunday matinee so that—. And we did have a certain group of people who followed us and came to every one of those performances. One of the unpleasant aftermaths of having to eliminate that Sunday matinee and go to a night performance is the fact that we did deprive some people of their opportunity

to come to the Little Theater because we did price ourselves out of their range.

It's unfortunate that we don't have an auditorium in the city which is suitable in all ways for all productions of this kind, both musical and straight drama. What is satisfactory for one isn't necessarily the ideal setup for another. We are fortunate in that we do own our own building, with the exception of a small mortgage, and we can do as we please. We have sort of expanded as far as the requirements of the theater're concerned. We need more room for storage because we're always acquiring more material of a technical nature which must be saved and reworked for subsequent productions. So we, at the present time, are lucky enough to be able to rent the warehouse next door to us. And we store everything in there and pretty much have cleared out our Circler Theater.

We had to give up the Circler productions back in the '50's just from the need for storage space. We just didn't have room enough to move all of our props and furniture from one part of the theater to another in order to free the Circler for productions. So they had to go by the boards. This was coupled with the fact that interest in experimental theater had dropped off. We had difficulty in getting people to try out for the plays since they had to be given in the summertime. It's always been my feeling that Reno is not a good summer theater town. The people who come here on vacations come here primarily attracted by the gambling, professional attractions, and the casino theaters, and we can't compete on that basis. So we sort of kept under wraps during the summer months. And when we finally did away with the Circler Theater productions, we more or less restricted our activities to the six major productions in the season.

During the '50's, we went through a period where we were doing six plays in the

regular season and one additional play, which usually served as a building fund play in an attempt to pay off the debt. We had built our addition for a cost that exceeded our available funds by about \$20,000. So we were carrying rather a heavy mortgage—or, rather, heavy payments during the late '50's. We hoped to get it paid off within ten years, but we had to refinance, I believe in 1960, when our box office receipts were dropping and we were unable to maintain the payment schedule that we had thought we were going to do.

During the '60's, we ran into a period of deficit spending, in that we were carrying over losses from one season into the next. We managed to get pretty well caught up as a result of these grants from the Council on the Arts. And we gradually got the help of the opera group. Their taking over the theater during the summer also helped us in balancing our budget so that we were able to start off each season pretty much letting it carry itself. The outstanding debt has been reduced, I think, at, oh, just a matter of two or three thousand dollars left. But it's my understanding that the present board of directors is considering renegotiating another loan and possibly putting in an extensive improvement program in the present building.

There are many drawbacks to our plant. A part of it is, it's nearly fifty years old. Consequently, it needs some reworking. We have no heat in the new downstairs area, and nothing on stage and backstage, so it is very difficult to work in the winter months backstage 'cause it's so cold, and in the summertime it's so hot. We need proper air conditioning. On the other hand, I think that we have a fairly attractive theater which is comfortable, and our audiences have got to adjust to certain inconveniences in order that we can continue to produce plays without losing too much.



The old days of making any money On a play seem to have gone by the boards, and I don't know whether we are going to have to go into some form of subsidization or not. When we were planning our first addition to the building, one of the first steps that we took was the matter of increasing the cost of the life membership, and we raised money in that way. We have a life member group of thirty, thirty-five people. A few of them have been with us since the very start of the life member solicitation.

I mentioned earlier some of the difficulties we had in the State Building, and the seats, the fact that we had sold seats. They were folding chairs. We still have some of them, I think, still left around the theater. That was a money raising project that we regretted after we'd started it. We'd sold about fifteen of these folding seats. They were very comfortable, they were steel, partially padded, and I think we sold 'em for the huge sum of five dollars, or something like that, in order to raise money. We had a list of the owners, and then we'd keep track of when those people were coming. And on that particular performance, we would put that chair in their place. It made them rather conspicuous, but that's what we intended. Then we had a little blurb on our program that if you wanted to help in the theater and wanted more comfortable seating, you could buy your own seat and we would put it at your disposal for a particular performance.

We used somewhat the same principle when we finally got into a building of our own, in that we sold the life memberships, and we guaranteed people, those life members, that they could have the same seat that they picked out for the same performance on the same night of the run for each show. That worked pretty effectively. The life membership list still contains some of the original names. And the price of the life membership has gone up from

a hundred dollars, I believe. Now it's at \$250, and I'm not sure that they're even selling any anymore. That was a gimmick to raise cash, particularly in the very beginning when we first bought the building, and then again when we were trying to put on our addition. Under the provisions of the life membership, a husband and wife could attend for life, and then it went to the surviving spouse, but then it ended there with that death.

We've tried all manner of gimmicks. We've had some significant donations. We came to a period of about—I think it was in 1965, when we received a bequest of \$7,000 from a lady who died here, and she wanted to leave her money to various tax exempt activities. Her attorney, Mr. Loomis, got us a grant which made possible the new front entrance to the theater.

The building has never been particularly beautiful—in fact, I think we can say it's one of the ugliest in Reno, and we haven't particularly improved it any by the new front. But we did succeed in making it a little more convenient in that the winter weather is sort of staved off by the barricade that we have in front and the stairway going up and down on the north and south sides. We were more or less in violation with our old stairway. We had no railings or anything to make it safer for our patrons to come in and out of the theater. That is why it was very important for us to change the front. We found that the portico, or porch on the front was beginning to pull away from the main building and it was gradually getting unsafe, so this donation that we received came at a very welcome time and made possible that whole new front and the aluminum roof that we have over there, and the shrubbery in the front of the building, which was an attempt to pretty it up a little bit.

Back in the '40's, I think it was 1947, one of the wisest things we did was, we had an

opportunity to buy ten feet of land adjoining the building, and we bought that from—I think it was the J. R. Bradley estate. And that made it possible for us to expand our stage building ten feet to the south of the old building, and gave us an opportunity for a proper exit on the south side from the auditorium and a sidewalk leading up to the front. The ten feet could well have been used on the north side of our stage, also, because we have trouble in designing our sets, in that we have a very cramped offstage area on stage right. There's less than ten feet from the wall to the wall of any stage set and box set that we can put in. So it's not very convenient for us to change sets on that side.

## PROGRAMS

One had to be careful in what went into the programs. Names had to be spelled correctly, and we had to be sure that we didn't get the right person in in the wrong part. I had to be extremely careful with the publicity that went into the newspapers. I was damned if I did mention them and damned if I didn't. I found that the ego—while there was a certain desire for people to express themselves, the overall guiding principle was good old ego, the desire to get out on the stage and to let people know—see them and know that they were in the play. So I had to be very, very careful about publicity.

Speaking of programs, the original program copy was, sort of by necessity, divided into two parts. I took care of writing all of the information about the plays—the cast, the crew, the acknowledgments; sometimes I wrote some of the material about coming attractions, and things like that. Then somebody else wrote the program notes about the cast. I always delegated somebody else to do that because I didn't want to be involved in

any complaints that might be registered about whether or not I did or did not give proper credit to the cast members. So somebody else had that responsibility. If I wrote any program notes, it was in a last-minute effort to fill up when I had a last-minute cast change. But it was always delegated to somebody else. I think Don Harvey Bell wrote the first program notes, and you can tell the literary tone of his writing. Then as I mentioned before, Barbara Jo Douglass wrote program notes. George Stetson wrote program notes in the war years. Let's see, George Herman has written 'em for about seven or eight years, I believe.

I had a running argument with George [Herman] over the theater notes, and, of course, here again, you have somebody volunteering to do it, so you can't be too firm. But I always insisted that George was too fond of the inside joke. He never wanted to write a program note until he had an opportunity to view one or two rehearsals to see how the people acted. And he very often used something from the play, or description, or some little gimmick that the character had in the play, and he used that in his description of the player in the program notes. It was incomprehensible to anyone reading it until after he had seen the play, and often he missed it the very first—if they'd seen the play once, they didn't get what it was all about. So we have gone through that period of trying to interpret [laughing] for people what the program notes meant.

They have varied over the years, just as the programs, the appearance of the program has changed. When you went through the files, you noticed that in that very first year, we had printed one-sheet programs because then we only had to sell one ad in order to pay for that one page. Then the cost of printing started to increase. And in that first year, we went

to somebody who was an amateur printer, and I think he printed—the programs were *Cradle Song*. And he printed those for us for practically nothing, just for the cost of the paper. And they were worth just about that because they were rather illegible, and they just didn't seem to be up to par. We fussed around; we used different forms in the first couple of years (that's when I say for *The Trial of Mary Dugan* we used a small newspaper). I think in our second or third year, we tried having almost smaller—it was almost like a flyer, in which we tried to make the program a combination drama-news magazine, as well as a program, and tried to fill it with lots of information about the theater. Then we eventually standardized on a program form which was—the composition was changed periodically, every three or four years.

The first major change was in the season of 1941-42, when we were moving into our own building. That was sort of a gala year. That's when we used a very big, large program with the line drawing of the building on the cover. That was an elaborate program. It was expensive, but it was very good-looking. I think we kept that up for two years, and then they had to drop back. The cost of the program, the need for so many ads to support it, put so much pressure on them that it was reduced again in size.

Then we tried to retain the program design for a period of about four years before we would change it. We had the programs printed in different colors so we could have a different color for each production in a season. We went through a period in the late '40's or early '50's when we were able to have pictures from the productions, and small pictures of members of the cast were scattered in with the program notes. They were the best programs we put out. I think they're of more value now, looking back on

them. For a long time, we had pictures—a picture of either one or two of the players or else a scene of the set or a scene from the play which was on the cover, which helped identify the play.

The rising cost of printing made us cut back. At one time, we had programs of two and three colors in a single program. We varied the pages. But that just got so expensive, and we were always trying to keep the cost down so we wouldn't have to raise the price of our ads. I think we charge the same for ads now as we did ten years ago.

I think one of our most effective programs was the one that we had for our twenty-fifth anniversary. The twenty-fifth year, we had a distinctive cover, and we used it only for that one year, and then we changed after that.

But the change in the personnel of the theater is reflected in these program notes. The art exhibits—the notes for the art exhibits have varied. I've written the majority of them. But in many cases, I've gotten whoever was the chairman for the year of the art exhibit; I've gotten them to write up the notes. And I usually wrote the coming attraction and the call for tryouts, and so on, simply because it was easier for me to do it than to try to get somebody else and then give them all the information.

## **PUBLICITY AND ITS RESULTS**

We had problems with our reviewers in the local papers. We tried to get people from the staff at the newspapers who were completely impartial. Sometimes they didn't show up to plays. They weren't particularly interested in those early days in covering the plays because they had to do that on their own time, and it wasn't part of their assignments. So then we tried using University people, and we got into some real trouble there because

some of the University students were really enthusiastic about making their mark, and so they would slash some of the people unnecessarily. But it appeared in the paper, and I had to scurry about and try to smooth all of those ruffled feathers.

We had almost a running feud near the late '40's with a *Journal* reviewer whose name was Peggy Trego. Peggy Frames was her maiden name, and she afterwards married the city editor of the paper. She was extremely caustic and felt that a proper reviewer *had* to say something damaging in some capacity, even if it was only criticizing the type of glasses that were used for certain drinks that were served onstage. She was quite ruthless in some of her dissection of principal characters. Some of those people (and justifiably) took it rather seriously because they felt that after all, they were donating time, and they didn't feel that they should be held up to ridicule. She could write, and she wrote it with a certain amount of flair, and often with humor, but it was also tinged with a great deal of acid. This went on for a period of a number of years, and I always maintained that our best attitude was to ignore it. But some of our people would get involved and they would go down and try to take issue with her, call her on the phone, write letters to her. I was always against that, and I never once challenged her on what she said. I felt it was her right to express herself. But some of our people, of our patrons, in their enthusiasm, would criticize her for what she had said about our productions.

So the battle of the critic and the actor is still going on, even in nonprofessional circles. And people were just as badly hurt if they weren't even mentioned in the review, or if the play didn't get a review in the paper. They were just as upset as they would be if it had appeared in the paper and they got bad notices.

I must give credit, in those first years, to the support that the newspapers gave us. In fact, had they kept up that support, we would be getting practically a special edition out every time we gave a play, in proportion to the amount of space that we get now and we got in the early days. I don't know whether you saw in the clippings,\* but the *Journal* used to run occasionally a full-page cartoon across the top of one of the sections in which the principal characters of the play were cartooned by Dorlan Peckham, who was a local artist with considerable talent.

These bits of free publicity were a tremendous help in getting started. One of the earliest reactions we got from the newspapers was the fact that here we were giving not just one play once a year, or once every two years, but we were giving plays regularly. And the inquiry was made as to, "What are you raising the money *for*? You must be making money to be giving so many of these productions. What are you using the money for?"

Well, there was this business of explaining that we were a nonprofit organization. We were only raising the money to put on more plays, to improve the playing conditions, and also to try eventually to get better facilities here in the city. And this is where this volunteer group of the women's advisory committee helped us, because they, too, by word of mouth, could spread the doctrine that we were in operation for the sake of developing theater in Reno. We were hoping, even at that time, for a tax exempt status, and we eventually did get it when we were able

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\*See Reno Little Theater records, Special Collections Department, UNR Library.

to give enough evidence that we were not operating at a profit.

#### **OTHER DIRECTORS IN THE RENO LITTLE THEATER**

On the directing side, I've mentioned in Children's Theater, the first children's director was Janice Swan, who came from Stanford, and Barbara Haran, who came from Oakland. And then later Eve Loomis not only directed Children's Theater, but also wrote several of the original scripts in collaboration with Dorothy Caffrey. In the period when Children's Theater was sort of at its peak, we also brought in some traveling children's theater productions from out of town. We brought in the Barn Theater from Porterville, California, who had a very elaborate production of *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Then we brought in groups from the East Bay Children's Theater and sponsored productions. We had a good response locally. Although we primarily gave the productions on Saturdays and Sundays, we did experiment a little bit in the junior high and senior high level with productions that started right after school, had moderate success with them.

Our directors—I think I have mentioned the work that Rankin Mansfield did during the five years, the war years, that I was gone. He served in all—he did anything and everything. And really, he was the continuity from one season to the next during the years when the volunteer regular workers were being called away and leaving Reno for various reasons, connected with the service, in most cases. And I do want to make sure that we give him credit for bringing the theater along to the point where it was accepted. It was a must in the community. And the productions drew very well. He had his difficulties with manpower problems, and

many of the problems he solved by doing the things himself. He was sort of a jack-of-all-trades, and not only directed, but he acted in principal roles in many of the shows.

The last eight or nine years, when we started using different members of the organization in directorial capacities, we have used at least once a year the following people: Dan Dollarhide, I think, has directed more plays than most of the others. Dan had some training in college in Oregon, in Ashland, and at the University of Denver or Denver University. Of all of my directors, I think Dan had the most natural flair for directing. He had a good sense of theater. He was not always as thorough as he might be, but instinctively, he knew what elements that should be emphasized and should be brought out in the plays he was working with. He worked best with me, under supervision, and I will say that he always took direction from me. He was about the easiest person I have ever had to work with as an assistant director. It was a very pleasant relationship. He didn't always rub people the right way, and as a result, there were people who disliked to work with him. But this is typical of any organization where you have volunteers.

Others were Dave Hagen, who is an attorney. He didn't have any real, formal training in directing. He just picked it up from having been in a number of plays. He had done radio work professionally while he was going to law school. He is, I believe, from the Middle West, and he has had fairly good success in directing.

Garth Lambrecht, I think, has the best credentials as far as training goes. I think he has an MA degree and has many additional hours of college work in various parts of the United States and in New York City. He is the most meticulous of all the directors I've had. He works with his people in a very



painstaking, careful manner, which is great if he has plenty of time and doesn't have too big a cast. But sometimes you can't always do that when your time is limited and you have to scatter your time over a large cast. He is the most sensitive of the directors, as far as the elements that can be brought out in a play. As I say, I think his chief difficulty is in working with large casts and assuming that they're going to be able to work just as hard and just as intensively as a small cast will, which is not the case when people have to sit around for a good while, waiting to go on. They don't, somehow or other, have the same eagerness to perfect their part as do the people who are on stage most of the time.

Other directors have been Dave Hettich, who did lots of theater work in college, continued it while he was teaching up here at the University. And his experience has been gained, practically, through actual working with people. He, himself, takes direction well. And he's very, very enthusiastic and an extremely hard worker.

Bill Cowan has been with the theater group, oh, I'd say, over ten years. He'd had some professional experience working in stock and doing some radio work and, I think, a bit of TV work. He's not had too much experience professionally as a director.

Euell Labhard has directed one show for the theater. He picked up some experience working with the melodrama group out at the Liberty Bell. His background is primarily training in music as a singer, but he sort of moved because he had done some work in opera and musical comedy. He moved over into the legitimate theater and had moderate success with his melodrama, and has done one show for us, and assisted in many capacities in various productions.

I also owe recognition to Blythe Bulmer, who has assisted on several plays and also

been principal director on a few others, although she does not have the time to devote to directing (her mother is elderly and needs much attention). So Blythe would rather spend the time acting in at least one play a season, and she has been business manager of the group for five or six years now, I believe. She has served in all capacities, has been chairman, has just done everything from the top to the bottom. No job has been too menial for her!

Bob Ware came to us in the late '50's, I think around '58 or '59. He was a graduate of a college in Massachusetts, at Amherst, came here to work in the American Savings and Loan for the president and manager of American Savings, who was a friend of Bob's father. Bob was immediately looking for some place as an outlet for his interest in theater, which was his primary interest. So he came to us and worked in many capacities technically, assisting on sets. He acted in a number of plays and also did some directing, and is a very painstaking, conscientious worker. His field was the technical side, and he was responsible for, I believe, one and a half seasons for us, in which he designed and executed most of our sets. He then went from the Little Theater to the University and was technical director up on the campus for four or five years, I believe. Then he got his master's degree in drama, and then went to Stanford and had no difficulty. He is now completing his dissertation for his doctorate in theater, with emphasis on directing—I mean, on the technical side, some directing, also. It's too bad that we aren't able to afford to utilize his talents since he has had experience locally and knows many of the people, and certainly has the training to carry on in a community theater. But his intention is to go on into a college theater, assuming he can find an opening somewhere.



## CHOOSING PLAYS

We have tried various systems on the planning of the activities of the theater, such as drawing up the bill of plays, the schedule, the rehearsal time. At one time, we just went along from one play to the next. Now we try to have a whole season's plays picked in advance and try to have tryouts one play ahead of time, so that at the very beginning of the season we are working not on the first play alone, but on the first and the second play, trying to keep one jump ahead so that we can allot more time for rehearsal. You can do that if you have plenty of room, facilities to keep two rehearsals going at the same time. We didn't always have that. In fact, when we were storing much of our stuff in the Circlet and downstairs in the basement, there wasn't room for us to rehearse any more than the one play. When we had the Children's Theater going, we used to have to have those rehearsals usually after school so we could hold them downstairs or up on the stage. Until we got into the week when our set became so complicated and was being pulled together, it was necessary to keep the youngsters off the stage so they wouldn't destroy more than [laughing]—than we could possibly help. But we have more or less standardized, systematized things over the years, just by trial and error, and it has been possible for us to keep two productions going at the same time.

As you can detect from the composition of our season, we developed a formula of opening with a comedy, closing with a comedy, and wherever possible, we tried to get the most recent release that was available to us. Sometimes in the early years, we didn't pick a whole schedule of plays. We determined on the types that we would have, as I said, the two comedies, the beginning and the end. We would include at least one

serious play, one costume play, one mystery or melodrama, and then fill in with whatever was available, with the emphasis, always, on the lighter side. Our audiences primarily come to be entertained, rather than to be challenged on a basis of thought [laughing]. The pattern has more or less remained pretty much the same over the years.

The last six or seven years, every season has been distinguished—I used the term loosely, now—by the appearance of a revival of a play done in prior years. This has not been always as a result of the tremendous success of the first staging, but due to the fact that the quality of plays available is extremely limited. As was pointed out to us in our production of the Shakespeare play [*A Cry of Players*], our audiences will not take everything that is necessarily a success on Broadway. Our audiences, even in this community, are extremely conservative. Even now, we have to be very careful about what we put on stage.

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## TO BE A DIRECTOR OF PLAYS: OBSERVATIONS ON TECHNIQUE

I think, now, I'm going to take a little time to discuss some of my ideas as far as directing goes, things that evolve, things that were planned, or which were more or less learned through bitter experience.

The chief problem in community theater lies in the fact that in every play, it is almost mandatory that you use a different set of people, a different cast. In our first year, we were using over and over again—sometimes we used the same people three times in a season. When you use people who are familiar with the problems of theater, or who have played together, it is that much easier. This first year, it was a matter of necessity because we were a small group, and we had to use some of the same people over and over again because we were not sufficiently established to draw newcomers into the acting ranks. That was our primary aim, to bring in new people. And we sort of set up an unwritten law that no play would be given that didn't have at least one person who was new to our audiences. Sometimes [laughing] this was a mistake! But we have, over the years, more or less followed

that. We always introduced some new person to Reno audiences in each play.

When you are using people that you don't know, there is a great hazard involved because you don't know so many things about these people who come to tryouts. I have been asked many times, "What do you look for in tryouts?"

Well, first of all, I usually look for people who type a part. The play demands that you have to have somebody who is an ingenue, so immediately, you think in terms of the age. Audiences who attend community theater know so much about the people involved that they will not usually accept certain things. They will sort of gag at the thought of a forty- or forty-five-year-old woman playing an ingenue because they know almost exactly how old or in what age group this particular person is, and they won't accept it. It can be done in the professional theater. Many times, you can see people way beyond their actual age group playing a younger role. But you can't do that very successfully. So you look for types, you look for contrast. You don't like to have

two people of the same physical appearance or the same timbre of voice, for instance. You try to get contrast in appearance—tall people, short people, fat people, thin people—so that you have much variety. In our early years, we had difficulty because practically all of us involved were around the same age group, and we didn't have enough variety in ages to make casting as convincing as it might be. We had, in those days, trouble casting the older parts, the character roles. And they were not always—our audiences, again, knew who the people were, and knew that such and such a person was only in his late twenties and he wasn't fifty or sixty, as the part demanded.

In those early years, we were not able to have tryouts sufficiently in advance of a production date to allow sufficient time for people to absorb the particular nuances of a part. We usually had from five to six weeks. Sometimes, if it occurred at the right time on the calendar, there would be as much as seven weeks elapsing between productions. That meant that we had usually a rehearsal period of approximately five weeks, five nights a week, and I usually reserved the right to call people together on Saturdays or Sundays, usually the week or two weeks just immediately prior to the opening of a show.

This really would have been sufficient time for an average production if the people in the cast would conscientiously learn their lines, the mechanics of learning the lines—if they took care of this outside of rehearsal. But in nine times out of ten, our players came to rehearsal and learned their lines through rehearsal. This was a phase of directing that I loathed. I couldn't stand it because it—just sitting there and watching people fight to learn lines sort of dulls you to the point where you've lost your objectivity and the direction that you wanted to go in putting on a show. But over the years, we eventually

had a group of people who had acquired sufficient experience that they were able to learn lines in many cases outside of rehearsals. They shortened the line learning period, sometimes, to the first two weeks of a show, and allowed the last three weeks of rehearsal to be devoted to polishing and working up the production. But for the majority of plays, the line learning process consumed four fifths of every rehearsal, and sometimes it consumed almost five fifths. The learning went right on, even up into the dress rehearsal. This, I always thought, was peculiar to our own group, but I find that it is a problem that has existed with community theaters everywhere, that when you are working with people who have to work at a job during the daytime, and usually have personal duties to take care of in addition, there isn't much time left in the day for them to devote to line learning, which is a dirty chore. It's the most unpleasant part of being in a play, the matter of learning lines.

With some inexperienced people, learning the lines represents the end of their preparation for a play. They figure that once they have the lines learned, they are through, everything is done. But as we know, that usually is just the beginning. The lines or the mechanics have to be gotten out of the way before you can get into the interpretation of a part.

In community theater, you also have the problem of absences from the cast. I have had plays that had been so riddled by absences that I have never had a complete cast assembled, sometimes until dress rehearsal. And there have been occasions when I didn't have a full cast until opening night. It was sort of a saying around the theater that I often used, "Well, tonight, we'll have to work around that difficulty. Well, we'll work around that. We'll work around somebody else's being absent." Sometimes we had two and three people

missing from the cast, and it just riddled the rehearsal, and it lost its effectiveness.

Another problem that besets little theaters in play production is the matter of delegating and assuming responsibilities. There are so many people who come to try out for a play, and sometimes they're successful. They are picked for a part and they're given the script, and believe it or not, I've never seen them again, or the script. Somehow or other, they have accomplished what they wanted. They figured that they were suitable for a play, and I have, on occasions, run all over town trying to track these people down, just to get my script back so I could give it to somebody else. They had absolutely—felt no feeling of responsibility for returning something that had been loaned to them.

The same thing holds true as far as costuming goes. Some people'll be absolutely helpless. They could do *nothing* to secure costumes for themselves. If it just called for modern dress, they'd say, "I just don't have anything. I can't do anything." So, many's the time, from my friends and my relatives, I would try to costume players. And your reward, in many cases, was that you would have to go to their home to get the clothes back again and take them to the cleaners and pay to get them cleaned because they didn't even have that much sense of responsibility. This is the side of play production that I found very harrowing, very discouraging, the fact that, as I say, some people will not accept responsibilities, and they're completely unappreciative of what you have done.

In the early years, as I have mentioned, since we were sort of an outgrowth of the Depression, we furnished everything for the people, the makeup—. Our reward in many cases is that the makeup disappeared after each production that some of our people were in. And we'd always have to keep replenishing

that. In later years, we finally got to the point where we insisted that people supply their own makeup. We have to more or less use a little leeway as far as how much we can expect people to contribute on their own to the costuming of a play. I have had husbands who have called me and told me they did not want their wife in a play because they weren't going to put out money for a new wardrobe. This was not always justified, and sometimes the wives used it as a device for securing a new wardrobe. I was always put on a spot in situations like that. This is where you find out that people are pretty complex. If this were a professional production, you wouldn't care about people's likes or dislikes.

You also have problems of determining what is right and what is wrong with clothing worn on stage. There have been some very delicate situations that I've had to face in which I've had to tell some ladies that they were no longer at the stage where they could appear on stage without wearing a girdle, and that they'd just have to do something about it. You would be surprised at the number of people who have balked and kicked and resisted and insisted that they would not wear one. Or somebody would show up in a gown that may have been lovely at one time, or it would be ideal for a certain situation, but just did not belong on stage. And you have an awful time. And usually, if you vetoed something that was being worn, you had to find an alternative, which put me on the spot many times. The play that demanded the high style wardrobe was *always* a headache for me. When we were giving plays for two or three nights only, it was possible to borrow dresses from the local shops. The trouble with this situation is that some people, again, would take excellent care of the clothes that were borrowed, and others would just take them off and leave them right on the floor, right where

they had dropped them when they removed them. And we had some very expensive, sad experiences of returning clothes that were no longer new, and that we would have to buy and then try to sell to somebody.

Furs were always a problem. I tried wherever possible to borrow apparel like furs from individuals because you get something that was worn. If you borrowed something from a furrier that's brand new and something happens to it, it's no longer new, and it means somebody's goin' to have to pay for that difference.

We had an experience with one play in which I had to have two mink coats on stage, and it was a worry to me as to what to do with them. So I finally solved the matter by having a locked room downstairs, and I put metal around the door lock so it couldn't be—they couldn't get in, pry the lock open. Each night that the furs were in the theater, they were locked in that particular room.

Unfortunately, one night, I was teaching at the University at the time, and I got a call in the morning, and it was somebody, a member of the cast who had been in there early (I think it was our janitor), and he called to say that somebody had broken in the theater. And I said, "Where did they head?" Because the night before, I had been trying to decide what I would do with some of the clothes, whether I would hang them on the rack with all the rest of the costumes to be used, or lock them up in this room. I had finally decided to lock them up in this room, which was the wrong thing to do because it was the only locked room downstairs, and the burglars got some sort of bars and just jimmied away at that door until they opened it, and the furs disappeared, along with the other dresses that were there. They were never recovered. We were about to be involved in a lawsuit by the owner 'cause she happened to carry insurance on the thing,

but since she didn't have enough insurance, she felt she was going to lose too much, so she was preparing to sue us. Fortunately for us, unfortunately for her, she was taken ill and died, which terminated the suit. So we got out of—[laughing] out of that one with a close call.

But this just sort of goes to show that you just cannot tell what you're going to run up against when you put unknown people in plays. You don't know how they're going to act under conditions of stress. Some people thrive on getting out on that stage. In fact, you practically have to use a hook to pull them off. There are others who get out on the stage, and are suddenly completely immobilized. I remember several plays, when two and three minutes would go by when the curtains open, and there wouldn't be a sound uttered because the people on stage were frozen. They were just literally stagestruck. You can't tell. Some people are obvious introverts; some people are obvious extroverts when they come to tryouts. And until you have worked with them at least in one play, you don't know how they're going to perform. Because sometimes, the most involved introverts, when they get on a stage, become completely opposite. They just seem to—*everything* just seems to melt, every bit of reserve, and they are just completely the most beautiful people to work with on stage. And of others that are absolute extroverts in everyday life, you say, "Oh, this person's just going to be perfect to be in a play." And you put him up on the stage and he gets on, and he immediately freezes. He becomes just as wooden and self-conscious as can be. All of which points up the difficulty of trying to analyze people in the short length of time that you are observing them in tryouts. We've had some doozers!

You don't know how they're going to act as far as the liquor situation goes. If you have



people who come to rehearsals and there's usually a smell of alcohol on their breath for every rehearsal, then you know they've had to have a quick one or two beforehand, you can usually be pretty sure that you're going to have trouble some way or other during the rehearsal period or during performances. I have had to act the role of the father confessor, the avenging angel, or whatever you want to call it, in which I have threatened every manner of punishment to anybody who comes drunk. And yet, I have had people who are prominent in the community—a-oh, I can't tell you—in professional life, very well known, who have come and been absolutely stoned on stage, and I hadn't known what to do with the situation. Sometimes I didn't discover it until after they were on stage, and other times there was nothing else to do but let them go out and make fools of themselves. Needless to say, I never used them again. But you don't know how they're going to react under conditions of stress.

There are some people who will have a drink before rehearsals, and it loosens them up, and they're fine. But the majority of people who are regular drinkers don't realize just how badly their timing is off when they're drinking a little or they have had one too many. They get out on stage, and they think they are the cleverest, unquestionably the most talented people that've ever stepped on the stage. And they think they are just making a tremendous success of things, but usually the timing is all off, and it's just a shambles.

I had one—I remember one play in which I had a new person in the cast. I didn't know what his personal habits were. In fact, I didn't know up through dress rehearsal that there was any kind of a drinking problem. But during the opening night, I was watching from out front, and I noticed that this man was gradually—his whole acting job was

deteriorating as the play went along. And I knew then, at the start of the second act, that he had been drinking all the way through, but it was a question of trying to determine where he had hidden his liquor. I spent the second act downstairs searching the dressing room, trying to find his source of liquor. And eventually, I found it. It was in a wastebasket filled with Kleenex, cast-off Kleenex from makeup, in the dressing room, and it consisted of a cache of little miniature bottles. He would take one or two bottles in his pockets, empty them when he had an opportunity, and then hide them in the wastebasket. There wasn't much I could do but give him a stern lecture and tell him I'll never use him again in a play, which didn't mean anything to him, since he was here [laughing] in Reno for a short length of time anyway.

But these were just a few of the problems faced in community theater. After you've worked with people two and three years, or a period of years, you *know* the characteristics of certain people, and you know how to face them and how to compensate for any weaknesses they may have.

After the play is cast, the usual procedure is to have a long reading of the play, read right through, and then have a discussion and an interpretation of the parts involved, and try to analyze the relationship of each character to the entire play. And this is the way all the books tell you it's done. I've never—I never did have a rehearsal in which I had the entire cast together at the very beginning and we sat down and read through the play and then discussed it, because people that were cast in the play always had prior commitments which prevented one or two or three or four people from coming to the first reading. So we would have a part of the cast there for the first reading, and at the second reading we would have the other part of the cast. Always



different people would be missing, so that you never were able to—at least I was never able to direct the play according to the way the books dictated you should go about it.

In the early days, we used to concentrate on perfecting an act at a time. It was primarily because we did have these absences, so we tried to get one act out of our way. We felt that if a character or player could develop his character in the first act, then the job of characterization in the second and third acts was easier. So I used to spend one and a half, and sometimes two weeks just on the first act before we'd go onto the second and the third. After a while, after two or three seasons, I discovered that it was better to have a complete run-through of the whole play early in the rehearsal period in which the characters found out what the play was all about. Because, believe it or not, there are many times there were people who were in plays and who didn't even know how the play ended until they saw it in rehearsal. So we would go through the whole play early in the rehearsal period, certainly during the first week, and then we would attack the problem of learning lines. The drawback with trying to stay with one act at a time and stay with it until lines are learned was that you usually got up into the third act, and lines were not very well learned. And they were always pretty shaky. So I tried to see if it'd be possible to get the whole play in the same state [laughing] by performance night.

I guess this is one of the reasons why one of my recurrent nightmares is that of directing a play and standing in the wings and discovering that the curtain is going up, and I've never rehearsed the third act. And it is, unquestionably, the most ghastly experience you can have! It's comparable to running away from somebody who's following you, and you're not able to make any progress. That is really a dreadful dream, not to have rehearsed

the last act. Sometimes, I would dream that I hadn't cast somebody in a part. And we're assembled on stage for the opening night, and there's somebody missing. 'Course, this has a certain basis of fact, because many a play has been cast in the last week of rehearsals. And as I have indicated in some of our earlier sessions, often on the final day of rehearsal, it's been necessary to make changes. Because there again, very often, it goes back to the matter of the failure of people to assume and accept responsibilities. Sometimes there were people who found that it was much more convenient for them not to show up on the opening night rather than face the fact that they were afraid. I don't know why people like this ever tried to get themselves involved.

It's amazing the change that will take place in people who discover that they like to act. I have seen personalities develop and change, in most cases, I will say for the better, because rehearsing was sort of a loosening-up process, and it helped them in their relationship with other people, just through the discipline of having to assume certain attitudes as demanded by the script and the lines of a play.

The early mechanics of any play, of rehearsal period, are those involved with the blocking of the action. This involves—oh, I call it the simple abc's of how you open a door and get on stage, how you move on stage, your position in relation to other characters, trying to find a weak position, the strong positions on stage. And this is the point where even the rankest amateur learned in the first or second or third rehearsal what upstaging another character meant. I could often see that tendency develop, where certain people would try to get themselves into the most favorable position on stage. I would have to call their attention to the fact that the scene belonged to somebody else on stage, and not to them.

But so much time is taken up in just the fundamentals of movement and the fundamentals of learning how to read lines. Some people never do learn to read lines, and they come on stage and they recite them, and they sound just like a parrot. They've never gotten past the stage where the reading of the lines gives the impression that it's the first time this particular person has uttered these words.

Here again, you have a temptation to use people, experienced people, over and over again because they have gone through these elementary fundamentals, and they're ready for something else. And this is one of the frustrating experiences of community theater, where you are working with new people. If your players are working in such areas as theater groups or art groups that are made up of a fixed number of players who rotate in different parts, they have the benefit of learning by experience. Each time they appear in a play, there is that much less time required to learn the elementary fundamentals, and they can start on something else. I saw this particularly in the short time I was at the Pasadena Playhouse. I saw youngsters who came in there to be in their first play (in many respects they were laboratory plays, or class exercises). And they were just—in many cases, they were just dreadful. And at the end of a period of six months after they had been appearing before audiences, maybe just before students, in so many different situations, the improvement was remarkable. Students were never allowed to go into a main stage production until after they had been in the school two years. After two years of playing in various kinds of roles, they just picked up a looseness and ability to master a situation. Some of 'em will never become great actors, but they all developed ease on stage.

The beginning actor on stage is a challenge to the director in that you have to try to find

ways of making him feel at ease. It's the toughest thing in the world for him to stand on the stage and do nothing and appear perfectly relaxed. I would often be beset by the question of, "What am I going to do with my hands?" And I'd always say, "Well, the rules say that whatever you do, you don't put them in your pockets." But you do know that sometimes people do put their hands in their pockets, and it is the best way for them to forget that they even have hands. But you have to try to keep them from overdoing this particular situation. If you can't get them loosened up to the point where they don't do anything with their hands, then I try to work out some sort of a gimmick in which I put something into their hands which will help them.

I have had occasion to have people carry handkerchiefs or walking sticks, or carry a package, or carry gloves, or I made them wear glasses, just so that they have an opportunity to take glasses off, sometimes to point with them, make it easier for them to use their hands. But [laughing] that can't be done to excess, either.

I'll never forget one play in which I had a young man who was a local radio announcer, and when he got on stage, he suddenly became conscious of the fact that he had not only his voice to think of, but his body, in the action that he was going through. So I had him smoke a pipe. But the trouble was, in the performance, early in the performance, he let the pipe go out, and he never got around to lighting it again. So he tugged and sucked and pulled and puffed on that pipe all through the production 'cause he was—it just became a crutch for him. And the reviewer called his attention to the fact that he had that terrible reliance on the pipe. Cigarettes—some people who don't smoke, I have asked them to smoke sometimes, just to keep them busy so they

could be lighting a cigarette. But whenever I did that, I always made them start early in a rehearsal period. By waiting until the last minute, if they're not familiar with smoking, they just look so self-conscious up there on the stage that it was painful. But you'll notice so many plays are written with smoking business in them in order to keep people busy.

Sometimes I've just turned myself inside out trying to think of devices that I could give to the actors in order to relieve them of this tremendous sense of impotence, shall I say, as far as movement goes. Just to hang onto something, have 'em go to a chair and just grab hold of a chair sometimes gave them just the necessary release. They need this, usually, in their opening scenes in a play. They need something that will break the tension because there is a tendency to get out on stage and plant themselves and become almost rigid, so that when they move, in the first movement they have to make, they almost fall over because they're just not balanced properly. So that's a problem that you try to lick by giving them action of some kind that requires big movements.

Sometimes you work in reverse. There're people who have personal mannerisms that are not apparent to you when they are first trying out, but they appear after they have dropped their books and have learned their lines. You discover that they are great scratchers, or that they are twitchers, or that they have a tic of some kind. And they are the hardest people in the world to try to break of that habit, because in many cases, they aren't aware of it. And sometimes calling their attention to 'em makes them only more and more self-conscious. So you sort of have to walk a tight line deciding whether or not you're going to call their attention to it or whether you're just going to turn the other way and pretend it isn't there and hope the audience doesn't notice it.

It's almost impossible to eliminate certain personal mannerisms, peculiarities, from amateur players in a rehearsal period of five or six weeks. Something that has been ingrained and has been with them all their lives is not going to be removed in a short rehearsal period of two hours a night, for instance. Yet I've tried, because sometimes I have discovered after the person has been cast that there's just—. They have certain peculiarities in their walk, or something of the sort, and you're just going to have to try to eliminate it to try to keep it from being too obvious to audiences. Of course, if you were in the professional theater, these people would not be used at all. But sometimes, you pick people because they have a nice voice, they speak well, or they're attractive looking, but can't act worth a damn. I found that so many times, that I would have the ideal couple on stage, for instance, from the romantic point of view. The leading man and the leading lady were just beautiful to look at, but one or both of them were *horrible* actors. And it's difficult to try to soften a weakness that is so obvious.

The polishing period of a play—. I might say that our usual rehearsals would run about two hours to two hours and a half a night. I would try to make them longer, on weekends, particularly. When people had not been working, they were fresher. If we met in the afternoon, we could go, sometimes, three and four hours straight through, and even longer than that, and they wouldn't mind because, as I say, they were physically fresh. But sometimes, people would come and they'd have had a bad day, and you just couldn't get anything out of them. And two hours was more than they could take.

The final rehearsals of any rehearsal period would see a lengthening of the time devoted because it would mean not only keeping the cast on their toes and trying to smooth

things out, but it meant bringing together all of the other elements of the technical side of a production, which meant the completion of sets and the blending of sound, and the acquisition of actual props, the lighting—all these things make a tremendous difference. The very first time, the effect of putting all of these elements together, it can be a shaking one for an inexperienced actor. They're so overwhelmed by the newness of this experience, of having lights hitting them, of being in costumes, of having actual furniture where they've been used to a folding chair, or to their imagination, and they discover they have all these actual things with them, they usually completely disintegrate. With other people who have been in plays, the assembling of all of these elements is just the spur they need to go on and really do a good job.

I have been asked whether I try to make people feel the part. Sometime during the course of a rehearsal period, I hope that these actors will feel the emotion that they're supposed to feel in a particular part. But it doesn't necessarily turn out that that situation is going to happen during performance time. Sometimes it comes late in the rehearsal period, sometimes it may come once, sometimes it may come several times. But what you try to do—at least what I tried to do was to get them to feel the emotion once and make them stop afterwards and analyze what they did when they were feeling the part, what their voice did, what their body did. And if they could go back and simulate that same experience, they would then give the impression that this was the first time they felt the part, when maybe it was the tenth or twelfth time. It is easy to say, but it doesn't always happen. I guess some of the charm, the fascination, of Little Theater for me was to sit in the last few rehearsals and to sit through the performances and watch the change that took

place in people. In the course of six or seven actual acting performances before audiences, you could see this growth that took place. That's why you like to use people over again as soon as possible, so that you could start at that point and work for greater development. But as I say, you can't use the same people over and over because your audiences tire of them, and the members tire of each other being in too many parts in the season, for instance. You have to realize that there are petty jealousies that go on, and there's always a great deal of backing and filling and trying to get into strategic position to get the right part.

The advantage of having one person being responsible for the casting of all plays, which I was for so many years, was the fact that I could try to budget the people that I used. If I had a hard core of, say, twenty people that I felt were extremely competent, they were good amateur actors, I would try to space them throughout the season so there was a nucleus of two or three people who could hold a play together in rehearsal and sort of bring the inexperienced people along. And plays were often picked with the idea of utilizing specific people in the course of a season.

The great difficulty when you're picking a bill of plays ahead of time, say, in the summer, before your season opens, is that you wind up with a play slated for which you have nobody in mind, and despite that, you are always waiting for the miracle of having somebody come in at the last minute who just fits the part. You do, more often than not, run into the situation where there is nobody to take the role, and you have to start with somebody that you never thought would be—you never even considered, remotely, of using in the play. And it may be just because that is the only person available, and that person has been coming to tryouts, and he's come regularly, and he has sat in on the preliminary rehearsals

when you have not filled the part. Because, many times, a week or two weeks would go by and I wouldn't fill a part until I was sure that I had the right person there. Sometimes the right person never showed up. So I would turn around and see who would sneak into the auditorium and who was watching rehearsal and have to pick that person and put him in. That explains why sometimes our plays had rather weak sisters in certain roles. There just wasn't anybody else around to fill the part.

On the other hand, there would be occasions when we'd have a fling, and I would decide that I would use all the best people I could get together, and use 'em all at one time in one play. There're certain plays that I can look back on where I had just deliberately picked the best people and put them in one cast. And the results always—I thought were a joy. After the first week or ten days of rehearsals, these people would settle down, and really work on their parts. You could see a growth and development there that was completely unlike the routine play in which inexperienced players struggled to learn lines by dress rehearsal time, or by opening night.

The worst experience in the world for a director [is] to see a play in which he's put five or six or seven weeks of intensive effort and see it fall apart on stage, just because of the weakness of one person or two people. Sometimes it's unintentional, but there have been occasions when it has been intentional, when things have been done by people on stage to deliberately throw another member of the cast. There has been a sort of a long, apocryphal story that the final production of a play, the final presentation, is the occasion for the cast to do everything that they can to throw the rest of the cast. That's when real liquor is put in the bottles, and the gag pictures are introduced, and all manner of pranks are pulled. I've always frowned on

this sort of activity. In fact, I've just dreaded it and did my best to try to discourage people because I've always felt that an audience, on the last night, deserved as good a production as the audience on a first night.

Let's see. We've had some very amusing situations, however, that have come out of just that particular thing. When the gag was attempted by experienced players, they were able to cover it, and they enjoy trying to demonstrate to the rest of the—or to the one culprit how they can cover up the situation and they can keep from being thrown. Very often, it is somebody who is new to the theater who comes in and tries to pull a trick of this kind. It's like the "hot" telephone. That takes a lot of work, to rig a prop telephone so that when you pick it up and you talk into it, you suddenly hear a voice coming in on the receiver. Or where you're just supposed to toss off two or three fake drinks, and you actually have real liquor. It takes a bit of doing to [laughing] cover a situation like that!

Oh, I don't know, I think that human nature is going to be human nature under any situation. But you see them, people at their strongest and at their weakest in a play. I've always said that after I've had a person in a rehearsal period and in the production of a play, I know him better than the majority of people who have been their neighbors, for instance, all their lives. Because it brings out the best, and it brings out the worst in people, their vanities, their frivolities, and it also brings out their strengths. If I sound as if I'm minimizing human nature, I'm not, really. It's just the fact that in the theater—. Who was it that said they hold the mirror up to Nature? You certainly do it when you [laughing]—you put people in a play and try to pull off something.

We've heard of the growth of the psychological therapeutic drama movement.



This is based, primarily, on the fact that through drama, people lose their tensions and arrive at certain truths and realities about themselves and about their relationships to others around them. And even though it can be the lightest, most frivolous type of play, nobody can go through the experience without having something rub off. And in the majority of cases, it's always for the best. That's why I've had people who try out, are cast, go through rehearsals, and then say, "Oh, I just can't wait for this play to be over with. I'm so sick of it," or, "I want to get home to my garden," or "my books," or some hobby they might have. And yet, when the play's over, you'll see them the week following. They've dropped into the theater out of habit. They want to see what the next group is going to do. And somehow or other there, something glamorous has gone out of their lives, because there is a big thrill in the stepping out in front of an audience and doing something and getting a response, either a response of laughter, or the response of that tremendous silence when somebody is touched emotionally. Or you get the opposite reaction, when audiences start coughing and you hear little movements, and you know that you're not reaching them. Even the most inexperienced actor learns, after he's gone through two or three performances, to realize when he is reaching an audience.

In the early days of the theater, when we started out with just two performances, we found that it was very frustrating to give just two performances. Opening night, everybody was so keyed up, sometimes, the players were acting over their heads, and the second performance they were just down in the dumps, and the whole performance was down, not always as bad as the actors thought, because they didn't have that same emotional pitch, the stimulus, of an opening night, and they felt they were doing badly. But

very often, they were doing just as well as on the opening night, but they weren't "feeling the part," as I have said. I think the advantage of a week's run, or two weekends, is so great that it is best to use an auditorium that is limited in size so you are forced to give more performances. That was always our goal in the very early days at the State Building. Here we were playing in an auditorium where we could've packed 1,400 people in if we wanted to, but we wanted to cut it down. We wanted to play before two hundred and fifty or three hundred people and have them all together and then give more performances to take care of them. That was one of our goals in having a theater of our own and having it limited in size. Now, we were told, when the Pioneer Theater was completed, that we could finally "give up our place up there on Sierra Street and move into a good theater where we could have big audiences and play to real crowds." And I was asked, "Now do you think you want to move?"

I said, "Never on your life!" I said, "We're perfectly happy where we are. We would like to give more performances where we are up there, rather than coming down and cutting down the number of our performances just to play to bigger audiences."

The charm of a little theater, as far as patrons are concerned, is the sense of intimacy that they feel in watching a production in the small theater and being close to the cast. We've had innumerable people who actually believe what they say, who have said they've seen a particular play in San Francisco or in New York, and they've come to our theater and have seen the play, and they say they liked our play better. And they say ours was better than the professional production. Well, that isn't the case. We know that our production was not better. But the circumstances were better, and the feeling of intimacy that existed in the



exchange and intercommunication between actor and audience is so strong in the Little Theater that your sense of appreciation is greater. And the emotional response is such that you think that production was really better.

I have never really believed people when they have told me many, many times that the Little Theater production was better than the professional production they have seen. I have had directors, however, who have worked in plays who believed audiences. And this is one of the most dangerous things that can happen. Because if you're going to succeed in community theater, you have to be your own severest critic. And if I were to look back, I would say that I really tried to be critical of everything we did. I enjoyed the response we got in many plays, but I knew when a play was weak, and I knew when it could be improved and where it could be improved. And many times I—well, in most cases, I tried to keep my mouth shut, because you don't want to go down and tell a cast, when they are feeling that they have just given the greatest performance that's ever been given on any stage anywhere, that, "You *really* were *lousy*," even though you felt that way (laughing). Sometimes you *do* have to tell them, take them to one side and tell them, just point to them why they missed the boat like they did. I hope that we can continue to be objective.

I like our audiences to be as tolerant as possible, however, because you have to remember when you see a community theater, little theater production, that here are people who are putting on a play in a period of five weeks, devoting maybe two to three to four hours a night putting on a play that has taken a group of professionals six to ten or twelve weeks working eight and ten hours a day, people who have already had much experience and know their craft. Here, we're

trying to compete with them and produce the same sort of pleasurable experience for our audiences. The fact that we have been moderately successful I think is indicated in the fact that we have managed to keep on now for thirty-six years. I don't know what's going to happen. Maybe next time I'll talk a little bit about [laughing] theater of the future.

I was hoping to give some recognition to the people who have worked hard in the Reno Little Theater. I talked about those who would not assume responsibility, and now I'd like to speak a little more positively about the comparative handful of the people who will take on any amount of work, anything you throw at them. And they will do it, and they are the ones who keep an organization going. We're no different from any other organization, where only a handful are the ones who do all the work, and then there's a larger group who do all of the talking.

Of the people who had an active role in the administration, the formation of policy, and so on, I have to go back to—. Among the first, I think, was Marshall Guisti, whom I knew in college, and we worked together in Hinckley Tire Service Company. I was working there my first year with the Little Theater, and I was keeping the books, and Marshall was Station manager-tire manager. I got him interested, and he came in and worked for a little while as business manager. Then through the efforts of Alice McAndrews, the "insuress," as she called herself, we had the support of another woman who was an accountant here in town. oh, the name left me! I'm going to have to look her up. Because she worked a couple of years with us and was just a devoted worker and got our books in order, and took care of all of our bills and set us up right. But she died, unfortunately, of cancer, after two or three [years].

Among the first chairmen was Bill Brussard, who came in, naturally, because of Evelyn, his wife's interest in the theater. It was much more convenient for him to come along and take care of whatever chores he could handle while Evelyn was busy. He had a travel agency in the Riverside Hotel in those early days, and he handled reservations, the advance reservation of tickets and things for us, particularly since we were giving our plays across the street in the State Building.

He was chairman for several years, and then he was succeeded, I believe, by George Stetson, who not only served as chairman of the board, but just general majordomo, general flunky, and did everything he could in all capacities, as well as in acting. He handled publicity, did a lot of the advertising, collection of the revenue from programs, and all that sort of thing. And he also was largely instrumental in the organization of the group when we tried to purchase the building.

During the war years, Carl Shelly was chairman, and I think he was chairman for a couple or three years. He did yeoman-like work, also was active among those who were able to put over an improvement program in the theater; this, in wartime, when materials were scarce. They succeeded in getting enough materials to be able to make the auditorium look pretty much like what it does today. They did over the lobby, moved the staircase, and actually accomplished quite a bit in the time when building was really rough.

Glen Judd was very active, not only as an actor, but also as a chairman of the executive board. Others were Paul Garwood, who worked for a number of years. Paul didn't do too much acting, but he was one of our real enthusiastic patrons who took an active part in running the organization. From the University, we had Bob Gorrell (he was chairman at one time), and then we had Dave

Hettich who was chairman, Bob Robertson was chairman for two or three years. In fact, he took part for a long time. Further back, in the late '50's, Don Hitchcock was the chairman of the board. More recently and currently, Susan Nichols is one of the few female chairmen that we have had.

On the business side, early in the '40's, Wallace McPhail volunteered as business manager. He was active in all capacities. He helped out in the physical work of doing over Dania Hall into a theater. Then he took over as business manager and ran things during the war years in the '40's. He naturally had the box office and spent many, many hours of volunteer time in the box office.

Esther Spence was his chief right-hand bower, you might say, and she spent many hours. In those days, the box office was a real chore 'cause it would be manned from early morning until late at night. It was pretty hard to get people—and is, even now, one of the most difficult places to get volunteer help. We have to use the answering service to take care of some of the dinner hours when the play is running. And we have the box office open from just one o'clock now in the afternoons.

After Wallace left in the early—around 1953, I believe, we had Joanne Garfinkle as our box office manager. And she continued in that job for, oh, fifteen years, I guess—almost fifteen years. She had the job of getting volunteers to help her help staff the box office. And as I have said, that was a real tough job.

It was as a result of our desire to reward these people for all of the many hours that they contributed that we worked out the idea of the service awards, which we gave at the time of the Golden Eggs.

We early saw the need for a certain amount of dramatic instruction. And we had—in the first few years, they were very informal meetings, not on a regular basis, in

which we tried to have exercises in acting. I know Don Harvey Bell used to handle some of the courses. Evelyn Brussard did. Then we stepped down from adults. We tried to get younger people, since we felt that was one way of enlisting high school students and college students. We tried to correlate the courses that they were taking in college. Later we were able to utilize the talents of many of the play production students. I think I've mentioned that in previous sessions here, that we used them in various technical capacities in an intern program.

Let's see. I think in the course of the discussion of plays, I've mentioned many of the people who've worked in an acting capacity. And practically all of these people have at some time or other come back and worked in another show in some technical job, maybe just working, being a stagehand, or gathering props, or gathering furniture, something of the sort.

I would like to list the various jobs that have to be done in connection with getting a play together. I guess this might be just as good a time as any. Getting the first play ready in each season is illustrative of what must be done to put the whole season together because we go through pretty much the same routine for each show, except the first play of the season requires a call to all people in the organization because they have been scattered over the summer. We try to get them into a meeting wherein we can outline plans for the season, let them know what has been chosen for production, give them some idea of what the plays are about, the parts that are available, and try to arouse their interest and see if they would like to express a desire to try out for a particular play in some point in the season. That gives us some idea of people who will be available and where they would like to be utilized.

Then we have the problem of getting the program organized. That means gathering all of the ads, changing the copy, assigning jobs to various individuals, like charge of the checkroom, the lounge downstairs, the ushers, house manager, box office people. All of the technical as well as house staff has to be organized. And usually, for each individual play, there will be changes in the technical staff. We try to have a stage manager, who is responsible for running each performance. Then there'll be somebody who will be on the lights. And if it's a highly complicated show, it'll require a separate person on the curtain, someone'll be in charge of music and sound effects, and then there will be somebody on the script who is supposed to attend all the rehearsals and take care of prompting if it is needed during performances. And then we need people to help on gathering the props. If it's a costume play, we need a costume chairman and a committee either to make the costumes or to borrow them or to beg them from someplace, or steal them, if necessary, in order to meet the demands of the script.

Then, of course, we have a great need for people to work on the sets. There's the design of the set, then the construction, the painting, and then if it's a multi-set show, we need a crew to shift scenes (have to find out how it works), and then put all this together with a crew to hang the lighting equipment and plug it into the board, and then work on the run-throughs with the rehearsals for all the technical requirements of the play.

We try to get the technical staff organized as quickly as possible, but this, sometimes, is difficult. There are some seasons of the year when it's very hard to get volunteers who have the time. The first play is one of them, because, as I have indicated in previous discussions, the transition from summer to fall is a difficult one for most people. They

either are too involved or they don't want to get involved. They want to have a little more time and stretch the summer Out as long as possible. That is why we have always aimed in the past to give one-set shows for our opener because we try to make it as easy as possible on everyone. There are so many things that have to be going on, because, in addition to this, there's the great attempt to sell season tickets to as many people as possible to guarantee a large initial sum in the treasury so that we can budget our activities for the year.

Then, each year, there are certain improvements that have to be made in the building because when you have an old building, it's always deteriorating and you have to try to keep up with things. We have painted and repainted the building, many times with volunteer labor. There have been, oh, the times when we took the burden off the membership, and I think we had the building painted professionally at the time that we put our addition onto our stage. We had to have a new ceiling put in the auditorium, and at that time it was painted professionally. A few years after that, my son, who was, at that time, I think, a junior in high school, spent one of his summers painting the building inside himself and moving the scaffolding around. He just worked alone. He'd spend three or four hours a day, and he got it repainted. And then he worked for a couple of—I think his last two year in high school. He was our janitor, which meant cleaning up after the work crews—to prepare the auditorium and stage for opening performance, and then if meant keeping the building in shape between performances.

The matter of janitor duty was a real tough one. I don't think there is anyone in the theater who hasn't, at some time or other, been called upon to do a little bit of [laughing] janitor work when the regular, assigned janitor hasn't

shown up or something. Even my wife has been down there and has swept and mopped the stage for some dance recitals when the people who were supposed to do it hadn't shown up and we were renting the theater out to try to increase the income.

In addition to these chores, there is the very important responsibility of publicity. We try to have the same people be responsible for publicity during a season and try to get different people to help for each play. We have had for the last ten or twelve years a standing committee that mails out the brochures or flyers or postcards. We have a mailing list (this is a volunteer group), then we have somebody who gets the copy together, and that individual has varied from time to time. We have somebody who is assigned to write up the biographies of the cast, the players, and then to write the rest of the copy that has to be put into the program. Much of this material has to be assembled at the very last minute, just as late as possible so we can be up to date with the printer, meet his deadline. Sometimes we've been in too much of a hurry and we've had cast changes in the last minute, which causes a bit of an upset.

The assembling of furniture, props, and costumes is one of the most trying of all the jobs in connection with the theater. It means if you have somebody who is really painstaking and is trying to do a good job, he or she will really comb the community trying to find the right piece of furniture or the right prop that will fit. If you have somebody who is a little slipshod and careless, and they're just trying to get by, it's a very frustrating experience to have all of these second- and third-rate substitutions brought in, because a conscientious director likes to have the very best things that are available to help dress the stage, particularly if it's a period show. We've had wonderful cooperation from the

local furniture stores as far as lending their furniture, much of it new. Over the last few years, I have grown very, very self-conscious about what we get from people, and I have not tried to overdo our requests and tried to enlist help from one furniture store once a year at most, or maybe once every two years. This phase of the theater was one I disliked very much, and it got to the point where—. In my younger years, I didn't care. I would ask anybody for *anything*. It didn't matter. But as I grew older and I realized the problems we could get into, it became more and more difficult to ask people for things that they prized and came out of their home, because we tried to find things that were *really* unusual in assembling our sets.

I scrounged all over town whenever I would run across a building that was being torn down, or an old house, and would try to make arrangements to acquire, oh, various architectural pieces that would help us. We built up quite a collection in our storeroom. We had some things that are still there that've been there, oh, for over thirty years. Many things, of course, have been lost. One of the best finds we ever had was tearing down the old residence that was on the block where the old Reno High School was. It was on the corner of West Street and Fourth, on the southeast corner of that block. It was a home built in the '80's. It was acquired by the high school, and it was used for a number of years for the music department. Finally, when that was torn down, they gave us an opportunity to go in and salvage what we wanted. We got balusters and a balustrade door and window frames, and a stair railing and a couple fireplaces that were all intact when they came Out of that old building. They've popped up in many productions after that. I think we still have some of the pieces, still have newel posts and things of that nature.

I think I've more or less covered the activities of the theater. r might wind up by saying that in 1967, I believe it was, George Stetson retired from the insurance business as president of Stetson-Beemer and Company, as I had become a stockholder and a full partner in 1964. I now became president of the corporation. We have had very good success, and we're still growing very well. I think my chief interest now is in developing the business and keeping an eye out for the Little Theater just occasionally [laughing], strictly as an avocation.



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## A TERM ON THE RENO CITY COUNCIL, 1951-1955

The physical change in the theater in the early '50's, the acquisition of the new stage, also coincided with a change in my personal pattern of living. In 1951, I decided that I was through teaching. I had been teaching part time at the University from the spring of 1946. I had taught two previous years, in '40 and '41. And in '51, I decided that I just could not teach again because I couldn't find enough enthusiasm to teach the youngsters who were coming along after the wave of war veterans was over. These people that were in college in '46, '47, and '48, and 1949 were just simply amazing, because they had been through one of the most catastrophic experiences of their lives, they wanted an education, and they really meant to get it. And they were keen, they were hard-working, they were challenging, they were asking questions right and left, and they weren't satisfied with the obvious answers that just a straight high school graduate would receive. I enjoyed those five years very much. But in '51, I decided I'd just had it, and I wanted to do something else to augment my activities 'cause I didn't want to

be just Little Theater again, and that's when I decided—I was looking around for something to do, and somebody said, "Well, why don't you go into politics? Why don't you run for the city council?"

And the idea—I just hooted at the idea of doing such a thing. Then I got to thinking about it, and I thought, "No. No one would ever vote for anybody who'd been connected with the theater group," because for many years we'd had to live down the reputation that the theater was a very artsy-craftsy, sort of way out, fey organization that no sensible, solid, stolid businessman would be involved in. I know that in the very first years we were always met with the question of, "A little theater. But what are you raising the money *for*?" They just couldn't conceive of the idea that we were being in theater, we were raising money to continue theater and doing more theater. So I thought, in a way, it might be a challenge, and I thought possibly my name might be sufficiently known that I wouldn't have too much work in putting on a campaign.

This is before the days of TV. My income was really quite limited, and I couldn't afford a very expensive campaign, and I wasn't going to get myself head over heels in debt for something that, after all, was sort of a whim of the moment. But I was told by some of the sage politicians in the community that the only way you could really campaign was to just get out and ring doorbells. I lived at that time in the second ward, on Vine Street (in the house in which I had been born, incidentally, next door to the house in which I had been raised), and I knew that section of the city very, very well. Then I knew quite a great deal of the part of the second ward that extended over across the river.

So I decided that on the hours that I wasn't working at the theater, I would just get out and ring doorbells, and I did just that. I covered the whole second ward, and I hit every doorbell at least once. In fact, I went around a second time, and the third time, I timed it to be just the weekend before the election. So I had handbills printed in which the voter's "X" was there after the name, indicating how you were to vote in the poll. I started out bravely to put one of these on every door in the second ward. And I got just across the river, over here on Court Street, and I started up, and I thought, "I have worked all I am going to work in the matter of politics. If I win, fine. If I don't win, it's fine. I think I'll just stop, right now. If they don't know who I am, it's just too bad." So I took a great big bunch of these handbills that I had, and I took them home with me and burned them. I just wound up my campaign at that time.

I was running against Emil Bofinger, who was a good councilman. I felt a certain amount of guilt in that I knew that this was the only activity he had, and he devoted his life to being a good councilman. But, after all, it was one of the fortunes of the political wars, that I had to be running against him.

On election night I heard the first scattered returns that came in at dinnertime, and they didn't look very good. I was running behind, so I put it out of my mind, and I went to the theater and had rehearsal, as usual. And I was called out of the rehearsal and told that I had won. I didn't even keep up on the progress of the election returns. So, being, I guess, more shocked than anybody, I was dragged down to the radio station and interviewed as to my reactions, and my reactions were one of being, frankly, quite stunned.

I might add that I think I spent less on my campaign than any candidate has ever spent for a public office. I think I totaled it up, that I was a little under a hundred and twenty-five dollars [laughing], including filing fee. That was about the most I could afford at that time to devote to such a project.

I enjoyed thoroughly the opportunity to get around and meet people. Because when you are running for office for the first time, you don't have any past record for people to pick you apart or to damn you. All you have to do is just shake your head wisely, either nodding affirmatively or negatively, when they bring up something that has happened at the preceding administration or to the incumbents. But I did discover that we had a wonderful corps of patrons in the Little Theater in the second ward, because a lot of them knew me, and we discussed theater as well as problems of the city. I think it was the first time that I'd ever have rehearsals that would be interrupted by council meetings, and so on, and I would have to be late getting to an opening night because of some city activity or something of the sort.

But it produced a change in my personal life from the very next morning. The telephone started ringing. And I learned immediately how important neighborhood feuds can be, back fence arguments. I learned how

controversial the ditches are that run through our cities, the problems of fencing or not fencing the ditches, and who is going to keep them up, and how do we dispose of the smells? And we learned that somebody's alley had been paved incorrectly, and after one year, it was already full of ruts. And it must be due to the fact that somebody was getting rich off the concrete franchise. Some people felt that their street should have been-paved at least ten years prior to that time; and others felt that it should never be paved, and they didn't want to be assessed accordingly.

One of the characters that I became acquainted with was Lloyd Patrick, who owned extensive holdings up on the bluff above the river. I would get periodic reports that one of my constituents in my ward was seen walking across vacant lots dropping lighted matches. This was a characteristic of Lloyd Patrick because he owned a great deal of vacant property up on the bluff that fronts on Marsh Avenue, as it now runs west and then south. He used to walk across this land of his (which he had inherited, incidentally, from his parents), and there were so many weeds and things over it that he would just drop lighted matches, hoping he could set these little fires which would keep the weeds down.

He always was full of ideas. And somehow or other, he could ferret me out no matter where I was hiding. I could be in the Little Theater with the front door locked, the back door locked, and he would find a way of getting in to find me to tell me of some particular solution he had worked out for a city problem. And somehow or other, it was usually connected with some property that he owned and which would be enhanced in value by development by the city, on either a street or an alley nearby. But he was such a character that, in a way, I got quite a kick out of him. But he did add to my burdens. It

was really amusing. I'd be building a set at the theater, and he'd come up there. And he'd go right on talking, and he'd help me lift boards and flats, and he'd hand me the paintbrush [laughing], or he would put the brush over on the other side, or he'd move the paint cans with me. It was really funny, and I got quite a kick out of him.

But I did find that I really was not suited for political life. For one thing, I didn't like being as tough as one should be in order to accept criticism and not let it affect you. And I was very much aware of the fact that if you were a councilman, you were always pulled one way or another. We had one source of criticism in that our council caucused before every public meeting, and we discussed many of the problems that were coming up in private, in which we let down our hair and went at each other, and tore things apart, so that when we came into the meetings at night, there was usually a unanimity or a firm disagreement of opinion. There wasn't too much argument expressed in the open at these meetings because we had fought all day long, and we had made up our minds. But this was something that—the newspapers went after us, and I suppose rightly. I think they have long since won their argument, and the secret caucus has now been done away with. But there is an argument on the side of the caucus, because you do analyze without any regard to what an audience is going to say one way or the other.

We had many wonderful, wonderful brouhahas in that council over some of the controversial measures. I'm trying to think of some of them. We had one situation that involved the Mapes family. It was very stormy, very dramatic. At that time we resolved the problem of what to do with the old YMCA lot.

I can't think if the inevitable arguments over public housing were going on at that

time. Buses were still operating, so we didn't have a bus line dispute, although at that time, there were indications that the bus line was running into debt, and that there was going to be a change in the near future. However, I didn't stay on long enough to get involved in that particular hassle.

Other members on the council with me were Roy Bankofier and Jack Myles, Marshall Guisti, Bill Ligon, Tom Harvey, and Charlie Cowan. I can't say that I voted with any particular group in there. It depended upon what the particular issue was.. But I think when it came to the airport, Marshall Guisti and Jack Myles and I were aligned for the airport. guess succeeding years will tell whether it was a wise vote or not. I think at this time that it was.

When in '51 to '55, my interests in the theater were shared with the work of the city council, one seemed to be working against the other, but I tried to make them harmonize. Only occasionally did I have a conflict when I'd have a council meeting on Monday night and I had a final rehearsal of some kind coming up. That was [one of] the first opportunities to get people to come in and assist in the directing by handling the rehearsals. For the most part, I managed to get those council meetings to hit on nights when the theater didn't have anything crucial going on.

This was a period when the city was growing geographically, and there were plans made for the acquisition of property. And it was really necessary in these days to keep things quiet so that you didn't kite the values up of some area which was going to be annexed. I think during that period, we took in large sections in the southeast and in the southwest. There was quite a program on. Mayor Smith was very enthusiastic about improving the physical conditions of the city,

like streets, paving. And since he was in the ready-mix concrete business, he was naturally criticized because the alleys were concreted. Everybody thought that there was a certain amount of personal gain involved, as he was concerned. I found, however, that Tank, as we know him, was conscientious. And the decisions the council made to take care of the alleys by concreting them were wise. Those alleys held up much longer than the ones that they experimented with when they put a hardtop, macadam, or tar surface.

We, also, at that time were contemplating such improvements as bridges. We opened up streets. I think that's when we made the preliminary steps to extend Plumb Lane to Virginia Street. And that was accomplished in several steps, but some of those steps were during Mayor Smith's administration. The wide sections of Plumb Lane that are just a few blocks west of Virginia Street were all incorporated at that time, and eventually private land that was owned right on Virginia Street was acquired at that time and in subsequent administrations.

Preliminary steps were made to bridge the Truckee at Keystone. And it almost progressed to the point of advertising for bids, but some of the more Scotch members of the council hated to spend that much money at that time, and they thought that it could be built cheaper if we waited a little bit. Well, when the bridge was finally put in, it cost far more because we were then caught in that inflationary spiral, and everything was much more expensive than it was in those earlier years. I think since the days that I was on the council, the budget has jumped—I don't know, five or ten times to what it was in those days.

Our biggest single, most noticeable, I think, acquisition of that period was buying the airport. And that was a bitter, bitter struggle. It split the council rather irrevocably,

and some of the members never did get along as well after that because there was such a sharp division over the purchase.

I think possibly my greatest contribution, if you can say that, was the fact that I was one of the few who held out for the acquisition of the airport. And in that administration of Mayor Smith, we acquired the airport from United Air Lines. The council of six was split three and three, and Mayor Smith cast the tie vote in favor of it. I was one of the three. The succeeding administration, I believe, afterwards made recognition of our efforts by putting a plaque up out in the airport in which the names of the council that was governing the city at the time it was acquired were on display. The next council put a plaque up with their names on it to acknowledge that they were the ones who were instrumental in getting the new building built. Then the council after that started to put a plaque up in which they were going to take credit for—what? I can't think what it was. But then they decided that it was silly to have all these plaques, so they took the first two down, and they left only the one plaque which is now out there. So somewhere, gathering dust, are two unused bronze plaques containing the names of two succeeding city administrations.

Roy Bankofier served on that council for a while, and then he left Reno and was engaged in ranching for a period of time. He was replaced by Jack Myles. Jack Myles came in and was in favor of acquiring the airport, and I think that was one of the measures that defeated Jack when he ran for reelection at the end of that four-year term.

Let's see, some of the other improvements we got in—I think it was in this period that Stead was reactivated, and provisions were made to extend the utilities out to Stead. And I think the [Highway] 395 was extended, and its approaches into the city itself were

improved. In fact, there were not many big improvements that were taken, but many little ones. I think the city was brought to a point where it was running well. Certainly there was no one more conscientious than Tank Smith as a mayor. In fact, he devoted far more time than he should have to the affairs of the city.

One of the great controversies was whether or not gambling would cross Virginia Street, whether or not it would be possible for anyone to build a casino on the west side of Virginia Street without putting in a hotel of a hundred different rooms. There were all kinds of pressures, even at that time, to extend the "red line."

The biggest problem, I think, that faced the city at that time was the matter of control of gambling. And this was handled in the closed caucus meetings because there always had to be an investigation of licensees. And the information that was gathered was strictly confidential and came from various sources—from the FBI, from various police records—everywhere. This information was of extreme interest to me because we were controlling gambling, which was really beginning to expand in the early '50's. Reno was feeling the effects of what was happening down in Vegas. There was a great deal of pressure to extend the red line across Virginia Street. I think Ernie Primm was largely responsible in the movement to try to burst the boundaries. He was restrained, however, and during that administration, gambling did not jump across Virginia Street, but was confined to a smaller area downtown.

The first convention hall came up during this administration. And at that time, the agitation was for a convention hall out in the Fair Grounds. There was talk about utilizing the money that was available from the federal government to build the National Guard armory out there. Proponents wanted to use



that money, and put something in from the city, and make a small convention hall which was popularly known as the “calf palace” at that time. They got the whole measure on the ballot during a spring election, city election. But it was defeated, unfortunately. So that convention center project, or what have you, collapsed at that time. And when it was revived, it was moved to a downtown area first, and preparations went ahead with an architect who was hired to design something right along the river, just east of Center Street. Those plans were well developed when there was another election (this time we had a change of county commissioners), and they were all junked, and the convention hall was built out in the country at that time. And then the planners found it necessary to come back into town to build an in-town convention hall as well. I don’t know—it’d be nice to be able to look ahead because we could have eliminated a lot of these problems if we had known what the answer was.

We had the usual growing pains of the city during that four years that I was in the city administration. Revenue was not keeping up with the expenses. We had growls from the police and the firemen for pay raises, all of which were justified. But the atmosphere of spending was not really generated during this period. I think that the council was very, very cautious, and they didn’t want to get too involved with too many elaborate projects. So it was sort of held back in many ways.

We had two city managers during the four years that I was on the council. Emory Branch was there; he was a holdover from the preceding four-year term of Mayor Smith. To further himself personally, he resigned, and was succeeded by Tom Hillberg, who had been an alumnus of the University of Nevada, an engineering graduate. And he came in, and he was very efficient as far as projects

that required an engineering background. He was not as tactful as he might have been. He was caught in a number of cross fires from different elements, and he was replaced when the next city administration came in. Actually, the succeeding administration had new people lined up, so Mr. Hillberg didn’t continue. I’m not sure; I’ve lost track of where he has gone.

I enjoyed the four years. I really got to know the city at that time.

When I did run the first time, I told my friends who were supporting me that I was goin’ to run only for one term, that I would then have no commitments, and that I didn’t feel that I would be voting or acting with an eye to how this was going to affect my reelection at a succeeding time. And as we got closer to the time, I was getting these rumbles about whether or not I was going to run again. But I scotched that by moving out of the ward into another city, so I was then no longer eligible to run from the second ward. And naturally, I wouldn’t be fool enough to run from another ward in which I had just moved. That took care of that situation. And as a result, I stopped having migraine headaches, which seemed to come on me just on the days when we had our caucuses and council meetings.

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## A NEW CAREER IN INSURANCE

After I left the council, or prior to leaving the council, I had another opportunity to make a change in the pattern of my life when we had a local election coming up. George Stetson, who had served in every capacity in the Little Theater that you can think of, including doing janitorial duties if necessary, and he'd been chairman for many times, public relations, advertising—had done everything—he came up one day while I was working in the theater (this was in the spring of 1954). He was my insurance agent at the time, and he just wanted to get some information on some of my personal coverages. He told me that he was facing a quandary because his partner, Bill Beemer, was thinking of throwing his hat in the ring and running for justice of the peace. George said, "Knowing Bill's popularity, I don't think there's any question about the fact that he is going to be elected. And if he does, I'm going to be in a real spot because," he said, "I just can't run the business alone. I'm going to have to get somebody."

And I said to him, "Well, if you need any help—you know, we've worked together

before. Just call on me, and I'm ready to step in there."

I never gave it another thought, and about two days later, George came in, as I was working in the basement of the theater. He said, "Did you mean what you said the other day?"

I replied, "I don't know. What was it that I said?"

He said, "You said if I needed any help that you'd be perfectly willing to help me. Would you like to go into the insurance business?"

I answered, "Well, I don't know. I was joking at the time, naturally. But we have worked together, and," I said, "I don't know. Maybe I would. I might. Let's find some time and talk about it."

So that led to a subsequent meeting, and the more I thought about the idea (I was coming to the end of my term on the council and I felt that I had to do something more besides put all of my apples in the Little Theater barrel), I finally decided that I would look into it. So then I started reading insurance and studying for the examination.

I went to San Francisco and spent a few days at the offices of the Firemen's Fund Insurance Company to learn the insurance routine, getting some training down there. Then I decided that I would take the examination, see if I could get my license in September. If the election went the way George and Bill predicted, I would go into their office in November of '54.

After my departure from the city council in 1955, I then concentrated on the insurance business, which I had entered in the previous fall, of November, 1954. I had the advantage of being trained by George Stetson, who'd been in the business for over twenty-five years. And I liked it, and the city was in a period of great growth, and our insurance business grew along with the city. I was interested in the activities of the insurance agents, of the insurance agency, and I very quickly became involved in the local insurance group. I eventually was sent as a representative to a national convention in 1960 in Atlantic City. And then I became president of the local association of insurance agents, served for two terms. After that I became an officer of the state association and served as secretary, and then vice president, and finally as president. I attended many national conventions during these years. I tried to be active. Eventually, I was elected a state national director for a period of three years and was actively involved in the work of our national association, which took us into various state legislative groups—I mean, to see what work was going on there, as well as the national level. This was very interesting work. I have been fortunate enough to receive some awards for the work that I did. I found that the rewards were unnecessary because I enjoyed working for the industry.

It was difficult at times to split myself in two and keep the theater in one phase of my

life, in my daily routine, and also take care of the insurance business. In many respects, those first two years, anyway, it was good. I always found that one of 'em was a great antidote to the other. The problems that arose in the insurance business could be shaken off in the evening, and I would assume the problems of the Little Theater, and vice versa during the daytime. made wonderful contacts in both areas, and to the advantage of both, I felt. There were many people who came into the theater, worked for the theater that I had met in the business world. I think the work of running an agency began to be a little too heavy in the middle '60's, as the insurance industry began to get more and more complex. I found that I just didn't have the stamina—the energy as well as the time—to devote to both activities. It was at this period that I recognized the fact that I was going to have to divest myself of the Little Theater's burdens, and I brought in the assistants to take over the direction so I wouldn't have to spend so many hours every evening in the theater. Because it was exhausting to go every night and all day long and then on the weekends. I knew that if I had to give up one or the other, it was going to have to be the theater, because, after all, the responsibilities of raising a family were such that I had to make the insurance [laughing] business pay.

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NOTES ON MY FAMILY

There were a couple of little anecdotes that I would like to get in, way back, as far as my parents go. One of 'em was the fact that I hadn't realized that there had been four generations of Semenzas in Nevada, that my daughter could be classed as a fourth generation, since I had always thought that my maternal grandparents, whose name was Feretti, were the first ones, the only ones to move to Nevada to start our family. Well, I learned that John and Mary Feretti were the first ones to come to Nevada, but after they were here a short time, they brought my great-grandfather over from Italy. They brought him—he was alone; he was a widower who came over with the financial help of his other children who were also in Nevada. He came to work on a ranch at Dayton, and he worked there for a number of years for his son, who was about as mean, as I understand it, as can be—and I use the term “mean” in all of its senses. My great-grandfather was taken ill (he was very elderly), and he decided that he wanted to die back in the place of his birth. And so he was trying his best to earn enough

to get back to Italy. My grandmother, Mary Feretti, who was his daughter-in-law, took it upon herself—here she had four daughters and lived very—they were very, very poor. Her husband worked as a section hand for the V and T Railroad. She tried to solicit from his other children enough money to send him back. But she didn't have too much success. She raised a little bit. But finally, he became completely discouraged with the work that he was doing. He felt so sick there in Dayton that he walked from Dayton to my grandparents' home in Carson City, where he collapsed. And that was when my grandmother dug into the coffee can, or the fruit jar, or something, where she had saved around two hundred dollars to put toward the purchase of a house. It was in coins, and she sewed this money into a vest for him, which he wore on his trip. This was his entire bankroll, and she gave him notes and instructions to hand to people he met on the way. He could speak very little English. So she sent him back to Italy, and he went steerage, of course. She instructed him how he was to take the coins out, not

let anybody know that he had this money on him. Of course, there wasn't such a thing as currency or checks or anything of the sort. So he wore this heavy vest, and he did get back to Italy, where he soon died.

My sisters dug this story out when my cousin [L. Wilham] died a few years ago. They found an old gun that he had kept in his closet. This was the gun that belonged to my great-grandfather and to his son. And it's just been handed down. I didn't even know that it existed!

I also found some other interesting anecdotes concerning my father, who had come out, as I said, when he was fourteen. He learned to speak English and to write English out here. I said in our first session that he had been to Alaska twice, but he went to Alaska four times. He went first when he was a young man of twenty-one. He met a newspaperman in San Francisco whose name was Fremont Older. He was a reporter for the *Call-Bulletin*. As a matter of fact, he was related to the owners of the *Call-Bulletin*. And this man had a brother-in-law whose name was Seward Baggerly who had sort of gotten into trouble in Yale. He was out of school for a while, by request, and he came to San Francisco. And this Fremont Older took a fancy to my father and asked him if he wouldn't watch out for this young man and take him to Alaska and sort of be his buddy, keep an eye on him because he had been raised in a hothouse condition, and he'd had two or three years at Yale. He said, "And in return, I promise you that Seward Baggerly will teach you English in those long winter nights up there in Alaska. It

And my dad met him and liked him, and the two of 'em were pretty much the same age. (These were stories that I didn't remember, but my oldest sister remembered our father telling her.) At night he learned to speak English by reading Dickens. He read *Great Expectations*

(one of his favorites), *The Last Days of Pompeii*, and a number of books that Seward Baggerly had [laughing] brought with him to Alaska. And then, in this way, there was a very strong relationship sprang up between the two of 'em. That's where I got my middle name of Seward, from Seward Baggerly. My dad lost contact with him—I don't know, back in the early part of the twentieth century. That was always a great disappointment to him, to have lost contact.

But Fremont Older became publisher of the *Call-Bulletin*, and when my oldest sister Nevada graduated from the University of Nevada as a journalism major, she went down in 1924 and talked to Older to see about becoming a reporter. But at that time, there wasn't much of an opportunity for a woman reporter. And she didn't have any luck. She spent the summer down there in San Francisco trying to get on with writing and finally gave up and came back and taught school in Fallon. But eventually, she got into journalism by going to China.

My father continued to learn English, and he was the one who had the dramatic ability in the family. He continued to learn English through Judge [C. E.] Mack, who was the uncle of Dr. Effie Mack. And they lived right over here [pointing], where the Cavalier [Motor Lodge] is, in a little house that I can remember. I used to deliver groceries there when my father had the grocery store. And Judge Mack trained my father in the Odd Fellows lodge. He trained him in the ritual, and Dad just *loved* that opportunity [laughing] to dress up and act on stage. I guess that's where we get it. My sister, Grace, had a tremendous leaning for theater, and my sister, Rena.

In my children's generation, I don't think there is any burning desire. Oh, my daughter occasionally said, "I would like to be able to



be on the stage,” but she doesn’t really have that much interest. She likes to see plays and movies. But my father was really enthusiastic about theater. And I think somehow or other he tolerated my abandoning an opportunity to carve out a career for myself in something more profitable by going in and starting the Little Theater because I think he secretly enjoyed it. And that first—I think it was a year and a half or two years or so, he was very helpful to me. He was my principal carpenter in building scenery. We built everything that we used in the sets, and he spent lots of time, used to go to our plays. But then he died early in our third season, January, 1938. But he always shook his head and felt that, really, it was a shame that I was wasting (laughing) my time on the Little Theater when there were things that were much more profitable that could be done.

In the early years, my children, my son, John Michael, and my daughter, Patrice, were more or less kept away from the theater activities, except that they got to meet many, many people. We always had a party in our home for the cast after every play. That would be five and six plays in a season, and some years we were giving seven plays. And the children had an opportunity to meet people, although when they were pretty young, they were in bed when we were having our parties.

My son had a chance to work in the Children’s Theater in those early years, and he appeared in a number of children’s plays and in one major production on our main stage. But he was not primarily interested in theater at all. His interest was more in the scientific area. Early in high school, he developed an interest in science courses and in math, and he won the state mathematics contest in his senior year. It’s a funny thing; he started taking that examination when he was a sophomore. He had had only algebra, and he was taking

geometry that second year. But he took the exam, and I said, “Why are you wasting your time taking this, going up on campus and spending that Saturday morning taking that examination?”

He said, “Well, I know I can’t possibly pass it now, but I can find out what [laughing] questions they’re asking and find out what I should study for in the future ‘cause,” he said, “I’m going to win it some year before I graduate.” And he did. By the time he was a senior, he took the test and he won first place, as well as a number of other awards. He was encouraged by the science teachers in Reno High School. This was the period when science was the be-all and the end-all of education. And John was not immune to all of this fever toward science, so he took physics in his senior year and did very well and liked it, so he was encouraged to go on. He was applying at various colleges, since he did not want to go to the University here. He wanted to go away. My daughter had gone from junior high school in Reno to a private high school back in Connecticut. John felt that he wanted to go to high school here and spend his four years away in college. So he applied at Pomona College, one of the Claremont colleges, in Claremont, California, and he was accepted. He had applied without even seeing the campus. When he received his acceptance letter, I drove him down, and he saw the campus, and it was love at first sight, as far as he was concerned.

He enrolled as a physics major, and at the end of his first year, his grades were good; they were better than average, but I knew that some of the enthusiasm that he’d had at the beginning of that first year had worn off a bit. And he confessed that he wasn’t sure that he was cut out to be a physicist. He said it got to be such a drag that he had to push himself so much that he just felt that he didn’t think

he could last four years of grind. I tried to encourage him to go on and try a second year. And he said, "Well, I will." And he started his sophomore year; he went the first semester, and at Christmastime, he was very quiet about things. He was not sure that he wanted to go on any longer. Then he came home at the end of the semester in January, and he said, "I'm through with physics." He said, "I just can't go back, so," he said, "I'm dropping out of school."

At that time, with my background, my parents felt that education was the be-all and the end-all, and the finest thing that any of their children could do would be to go right on through college and never take any time off [laughing]. And I had been trained that way, and I'll have to admit that that was the attitude I had when John said that he was going to drop out of school, and he was going to get his military obligation out of the way and then go back. And he said, "They told me at Pomona that I can come back any time I want to."

We talked, but he was adamant; he was determined that he would drop out at that time, which he did, and then he went into the marines in their six months' program and then six years of reserve duty. He put in his six months of boot training. And when he came out, it was December, so he decided that he would not go back to school until the following fall. At that time, he was figuring that he would probably want to go into a premed course, and would change his major in college to zoology. So he joined the union, hod carriers' union, and he worked as a hod carrier up until September of the following year. He reentered Pomona, and he went straight through for three years with a zoology major. He was accepted in the UCLA medical school prior to graduation. He just stayed in southern California and kept on. After his first year back at Pomona working on a

zoology major, he was sure that he had found the subject that interested him. And now he's in his final year of medical school, and he is delighted that he has made the change. And he feels sure that he picked the right field. I hope he's right, because it's been a *long* struggle.

He had about a year more to go on his six years of reserve. He went on weekend training every month all through Pomona. And he said, "I couldn't possibly go through medical school and take those weekends every month in the marine training, because I'm usually knocked out for two days after I get back, they're so strenuous physically." So he resigned from the Marine Reserve and joined the Air Force Reserve Officers program. He is a reserve officer in the Air Force for the four years that he's in medical school. Then when he gets out, he has a chance to select a time when he'll have to put in two years of service as a medical officer. And he figures he'll probably do it after he has served his residency and has a specialty 'cause then he would have a better opportunity.

So he has this whole career all blocked and planned, as far as the future is concerned. It makes it easy for a parent when the child knows exactly what he wants to do. All you have to do is figure out how to—[laughing] how to pay for it! But there are lots of parents who would like to be able to pay for it if they could just help in some way, or get their children directed along a route in which they were happy and seem to be fitted. I consider that I'm extremely fortunate to have that happen with my son.

My daughter has been a little more conventional. As I said, she had spent four years in a private school. It was called Westover, back in Middlebury, Connecticut. She went back there at the age of thirteen, largely through friends whom we had met who had just come out to live in Reno. He had

been on the board of trustees of this private school and had contributed heavily to it. One evening he told us about Westover, and it was funny. This was a school that my daughter had heard about from the time she was in kindergarten because the mother of the girl who was her closest friend in kindergarten had gone to this school, and it was one of those family traditions where girls in each generation went to Westover. So my daughter, at the age of thirteen, knew all of the school songs and everything else, and it was just a natural step for her. But my wife and I were a little bit upset and a little shaken because we couldn't afford to go back to the school just to see what it was all about. We had to make every trip count. So we put Pat on a plane when she was thirteen years old and sent her [laughing] back East. The school wouldn't permit a parent to accompany the children to the school. They could only go as far as New York City and put the child on a train, a special car, that went to the school. And they had to say goodbye at the depot, and they couldn't see their children for six weeks, which, in a way, seems rather grim. But I discovered it was very sensible, because my wife then went back after these six weeks and visited when it was—I don't know, was an affair for mothers. My daughter had been completely brainwashed in all the traditions. There was no such thing as homesickness, and she just loved it. Maybe that was a smart thing.

But I notice by looking at the publications that come from the school that even this, too, has changed. My daughter also notices the changes with a great deal of regret. Many of the rules which seem extremely rigid now but were accepted and seemed the natural thing have been changed, and the whole attitude is changing in the private schools. The youngest sister of my daughter's chum was the third member of the family to go back there,

and she lasted two years. It was more than she could take. The tradition of the family [laughing] wasn't strong enough to keep her back there. And all these changes and all these tensions that are felt in the schools now are being felt even in the private schools.

My daughter graduated from Westover in 1965. She was determined that she wanted to go to the University of Nevada. And she did because she felt that she had been four years away from Reno, and she wanted to come back and meet again some of the people that she knew when she was growing up. Pat went through four years at the University of Nevada, graduated with a major in English, prepared to teach secondary—a credential in secondary education. And she was fortunate enough to get a teaching position in English in Hug High School. And she is now in her second year there. I think this will be her last year teaching in high school because she is a little disillusioned with it, does not like the problems that you have to face with the high school generation right now. Maybe she's a little bit old-fashioned in that respect. She enjoys the actual teaching, but she hates the disciplinary problem, as well as many of the other problems that compound the student-teacher relationship these days.

I do not take credit for the fact that we, as parents, have been freed from the problems of the teenagers. We were very, very lucky. I have to give most of the credit to my wife, however, since she had most of the burden of raising the children. I was gone so much of the time, practically every night of the week, when they were young and first growing up.

I don't think I've mentioned the fact that Mary was born in Fresno, California. She was of Spanish ancestry. Both her mother, Eulalia, and father, Javier Elcano, were born in Spain and came over to Fresno as young adults. Her father owned a hotel, which he

ran, and they had a very nice life. My wife went to a parochial school through high school. However, her parents were victims of the Depression, and her father lost the hotel, and she moved to Reno to spend the summer with her uncle. She had a sister, younger sister, Juanita, and a brother, Michael. Her father suffered a breakdown and he was recuperating out in a sheep camp when he was bitten by a tick, and died of tick fever. He was forty-eight at the time. This put a burden on my wife, and so at seventeen, she started work as a legal secretary. She was trained in the office of William Kearney. She worked for him for a number of years and helped put her brother and her sister through college, even though it had always been her ambition to go to college. But she wasn't the slightest bit bitter about this sacrifice. She got a great deal of satisfaction out of seeing that her brother and sister graduated.

Mary is an extremely resourceful person. I think I have indicated that we met through the Little Theater, and she helped me in many ways in furthering the interests of the theater, both physically and emotionally and in all ways. I think one of the early successes of the theater can be traced to the fact that all members were quite a closely knit group, and we had lots of activities in which we were able to have many pleasant, inexpensive [laughing] experiences. And certainly, those first years of our marriage after I came back to the theater from the Army were very pleasant ones, largely because Mary was so undemanding, and was so cooperative in furthering the activities of the theater. She no longer had any interest in acting once we were married, no longer had any time for technical assistance. She was devoted to the responsibility of raising our children. She has, in the past few years, on occasion, gone back to working as a legal secretary because she was called back

by attorneys who were associated in the firm with Mr. Kearney. They got into a bind about seven years ago, and she has helped them out on occasion, and so she continues to work, even now, part time, and enjoys very much having an opportunity to sharpen her skills as a secretary. And she's very good as a legal secretary. Despite the fact that I keep trying to get her to stop, she loves nothing better than to work on a complicated brief [laughing], and I'm afraid she's hooked for a while—I don't know, until she runs out of steam.

My activities were complicated a little bit during the summer [of 1954] because that's when I had purchased this home that had belonged to Governor Scrugham. His wife, Julia (this was Governor Scrugham's widow), owned it at the time, and I had been negotiating for its purchase in the spring of that year. In the middle of our negotiations, she died very suddenly of a heart attack, and I had to wait three months for the necessary legal waiting period before I was able to buy the house. I spent the summer working on the remodeling of the place because my wife and I have always had great ideas about how we want to do something over.

And that was a very interesting situation. We had purchased a lot up on the bluff overlooking Reno High School, and we were, in that spring, working on designs for the house to be built when the time was right. We were invited to play bridge at the home of Colonel and Mrs. Loewus. Ann Loewus had been active in the Little Theater. She was the wife of the head of the military department at the University. And she happened to say that she was interested in playing bridge, and since both my wife and I like bridge, she invited us to come over.

Well, that house, I had seen it, driven by University Terrace all my life, and somehow or other, I had never paid any attention to it. I

never really noticed that it existed, that there was such a place, until she said, "We live at 760 Nevada Street."

And I said, "Where in the world is that?"

And she said, "It's just off University Terrace."

I said, "I haven't any idea—."

She said, "Well, it's a dead-end street. You can't reach it by going up Nevada Street. You have to go off University Terrace."

So we went to her home, and I stepped in the home, and I looked around, and I said, "Gosh, this is an interesting place!"

My wife said, "Now, listen. Don't you get any ideas about wanting to buy this place and remodel it because we've already remodeled one old house, and we're going to develop that lot that we have and put a new house on it."

So I said, "Okay."

But that night, I kept looking around as we played bridge. And then when we got home, I said, "Do you know that really, really would be—it would be so easy to remodel that house. It just has all the things I want." I said, "It's true, it has a lot of bad, glaring defects, things that are old-fashioned," I said, "but it has the most modern floor plan. I've got to find out something about it."

Then I went up and talked to Mrs. Scrugham, and I had in my mind the idea of possibly leasing it from her, because, at the time, we had two growing children, and we felt that we should move into a bigger house. So I talked with her, and she said, "Do you know, I would lease it to you." She said, "I have been asked to sell it many, many times, and I've always wanted to be able to choose my next door neighbor, and that's why I've never sold it. If you'd like to lease it, I'd be happy to."

So I thought, "That's fine."

Then Mary and I talked about it, and I had her around to the point where she agreed to lease for a while. And then we

started dreaming about these little changes that we would put in. Well, finally, when we got through, we were so involved that it was obviously economically foolish—disastrous, in fact—for us to try to lease the house and put that much money into changes. So then we veered around to the idea—I finally had her really warmed up to the idea that possibly we should buy the house. Then I approached Mrs. Scrugham (and she was a wonderful person), and I said, "Would you be interested, by any chance, in selling that house?"

After a few seconds she replied, "You know, Harry Scheeline lived there for over twenty-five years, and he always wanted to buy it. I never sold it." She said, "I don't know. I'd have to ask my son and get his views on it." She'd no sooner said that than young Jim walked in the door. And she said, "Jim, I was just thinking about selling this house to Ed here. What would you think?"

Jim answered, "Anything you want to do is fine with me. If you want to sell it to him, you go ahead and sell it to him."

And that's the way it was. She said, "All right, I'll sell it to you."

Soon we were in the process of coming to an agreement on price and terms. We finally did agree on a price. It was the last Sunday afternoon of *Street Scene*. And we had to delay the curtain. Ann Loewus was late in getting there, and when she came in, I could see that something had happened. She said Julia had a heart attack, and she was unconscious at that moment. So we had a very agonizing performance. And by the time the matinee was over, Mrs. Scrugham had died. So everything was up in the air, and we had to wait, as I say, the three months. Jim was wonderful, did all the things that his mother wanted to do. We moved in—I mean, we started alterations in June and moved in (of course, before it was completed) in August



because I had sold my other house and sold our lot.

Mary and I have said not once, but hundreds of times, one of the greatest things we ever did was to buy that house. And it's always gratifying when our children say, "Don't you *ever* think of selling this house." We have acquired other property in the neighborhood, and I have talked about moving from that into other houses, and I get such a storm of protest that I know that in 1954, we made the right [laughing] move when we bought the house.

Just two years ago, Velda Morby, who is a local artist, called me to tell me that she was going through some of her paintings and was having an exhibit. A number of years ago, when she was first starting to paint, she had gone up on Maple Street and sat down there and looked up at our house, sitting up there in back of the weeping willow. And at that time, a house belonging to Dr. A. E. Hill was down below us on Maple Street, and there was a stone wall in front of it. And a beautiful Lombardy poplar was in the back yard of the Hill house. Velda saw all this, and she thought it would be a wonderful subject to paint, and she painted it. She asked me to go down to a gallery and look at it. And so I grabbed my daughter, Pat, and said, "Let's go look at the painting."

Well, it had been moved from where it was supposed to be exhibited, and we chased that painting all over town. And eventually, we found it, and we liked it very much. We thought it would just be lovely to have in the house. Pat said, "Oh, we've got to get it!"

I said, "That's right."

But something came up, and I didn't do a thing for several days. My daughter kept nagging me to find out about it. And then finally, I went to the—it was hanging in the gallery, I think, up in the Arlington Towers. It

was supposed to be hanging in a beauty shop. So I called Mrs. Morby, and she said, "I'm awfully sorry, but the painting has been sold."

I was crushed, as I told my daughter, and she was also crushed. And then, of course, when Christmas came, there was a package. Pat had sneaked out and bought the painting, and that was her surprise to us. We have it in the house, and that's just sort of a testimonial as to how much she thinks of our home.

We have sort of capitalized on my—well, shall I say, being modest, my aptitude in set design and set construction, so that I've been able to do a lot of the remodeling and decorating work myself. It's been fun planning and adding. Instead of building the whole thing at once, you make changes as you go along. And that house has been constantly changing as we have lived there. And I guess now, after the theater's gone, that it's become my principal hobby.

I have no regrets. I think I have managed to get the best out of two different kinds of worlds, the world of theater and the world of business. For a good many years, I was able to keep the two of them compatible. I have absolutely no desire to go back and just concentrate on theater again. I don't think I ever will be able to generate the enthusiasm to work actively in theater. I will always enjoy going to plays, of course. And I guess I will enjoy reading them again, when they get some decent ones to read [laughing]. And that just about winds us up, I think, as far as I can look back.



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## ORIGINAL INDEX: FOR REFERENCE ONLY

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